

**AMBIVALENT ASPIRATIONS:  
AID AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF PROXIMITY  
IN A JAPANESE NGO IN BURMA/MYANMAR**

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

### AMBIVALENT ASPIRATIONS: AID AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF PROXIMITY IN A JAPANESE NGO IN BURMA/MYANMAR

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Japanese aid has generally been understood to focus on developmentalist infrastructural projects, but since the 1990s, Japanese aid actors have also emphasized “soft” aid. One example of soft aid is *hitozukuri* (“making persons”): human resource development activities such as training programs. Based on 20 months of fieldwork tracing a Japanese NGO’s activities “making persons” across Japan and Burma/Myanmar, I examine the cultural politics of aspiring to create relational proximity among aid actors that undergirds *hitozukuri* aid. Specifically, I study the Organizational for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement (OISCA), one of the oldest nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Japan that derives from a Shinto-based new religion called Ananaikyō. OISCA has been conducting training programs in sustainable agriculture for Asian rural youth in Japan and around the Asia-Pacific since the 1960s. These programs aim to construct intercultural and interpersonal proximity among aid workers and trainees who live together for a year “like family” in training centers. As one of the most prominent NGOs in Japan that has received significant support from politicians and government officials, I suggest that the aspirations for proximity in OISCA are emblematic of general understandings of *hitozukuri* aid.

While recent studies of humanitarianism have shed light on the paradox between humanitarian ideals and practices, the dilemmas that emerge in the intercultural

encounters that are at the core of international aid work have been largely overlooked. My dissertation elucidates how aspirations for proximity in cross-cultural relations produce a particular politics of ambivalence in *hitozukuri* aid. On the one hand, the dominant aspirations for proximity in OISCA generate positive forms of belonging and “being human.” On the other hand, such aspirations also involve a violent erasure of differences, at the same time that “cultural differences” are upheld. As such, national-culturalism and the aspiration for proximity are two sides of the same coin in *hitozukuri* aid. The dissertation ultimately argues that aid ideologies of humanity based on ideas of proximity should alert us to a politics of global culturalism that is both alluring and violent, producing a variety effects on different aid actors.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Chika Watanabe graduated from Swarthmore College with a B.A. in Sociology/ Anthropology, and from Oxford University with a M.Sc. in Forced Migration. Before pursuing her Ph.D. at Cornell, she worked with nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations in New York, Japan, and Thailand.

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In addition, in Japan I spoke and spent time with staff at the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) in Tochigi, the Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP) office in Tokyo, the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV)

training center in Nagano, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) offices in Tokyo and Aichi, and Risshō Kōseikai. I thank them for entertaining my visits and questions, which I know were sometimes strange for a project on “international aid.” I also thank the UNDP official, Morita, for letting me pick his brains about OISCA’s origins in Burma/Myanmar over Skype.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **The Ambivalent Struggles of Aid Work**

Takai was a young staff in his early thirties at the Japanese NGO,<sup>1</sup> the Organization for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement (OISCA), and he was one of the first OISCA staff with whom I had an extended conversation. Takai and I only interacted for a few weeks in the fall of 2009 at the OISCA Tokyo headquarter, since soon after I began research, he was sent to the project in Bangladesh. Despite our brief contact, as I pored over my fieldnotes in subsequent months and years, my first conversation with him kept coming back to me. There was nothing particularly extraordinary about what he told me—from his experience going to Thailand with his class in university where he first found an interest in international aid work, to failing the exam for the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) program and subsequently joining OISCA.<sup>2</sup> This was a narrative that resembled the trajectory of other young NGO workers I met in Japan. Yet, something about the conversation stayed in my mind.

Eventually I understood that what kept pulling me back to this conversation was his struggle over his understanding of and commitment to OISCA. I realized—or rather, finally accepted—that the confusion and internal conflict that Takai showed were modalities of ambivalence, an expression of the dynamism of interpersonal relations that were central not only to aid actors' experiences and commitments to their

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation I use the term “NGO” to refer to nonprofit organizations in Japan that are registered as nonprofit entities and conduct activities overseas. Nonprofit organizations that work domestically are ordinarily called “nonprofit organization (NPO)” in Japan, and distinguished from NGOs.

<sup>2</sup> JOCV is the Japanese version of the Peace Corps, operated by the government aid agency, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

work, but to understandings of international aid work in OISCA. Aid work was not, as I had assumed, acts of ethical judgment, assemblages of expertise and government, or even oppositions to such assumptions. As I argue further below, OISCA's aid actors—aid workers, recipients (trainees), donors, and supporters—understood aid work in the doubleness of things rather than their certainty, the perpetual presence of two or more contexts that demanded constant acts of discernment, but made final conclusions impossible.

OISCA conducts year-long training programs in sustainable agriculture in Japan and around the Asia-Pacific, and Takai had worked for years as an instructor in organic vegetable cultivation at OISCA's training centers in Fukuoka in southern Japan and Burma/Myanmar.<sup>3</sup> He told me that when he first joined the training center in Fukuoka, the director sent him to the OISCA vocational college (*senmon gakkō*), an institution founded by Yonosuke Nakano to nurture future OISCA staff. Takai spent about a month and a half there to learn about sustainable agriculture, as well as about OISCA's approaches to international aid. He explained that classes included lessons on Shinto, and what it means to be Japanese in the contemporary world and in international aid. For example, teachers told him that when Japanese people are asked about their religion, they tend to answer that they have none, but that if they were to reply in that manner in most other parts of the world, people would see them as dangerous and

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<sup>3</sup> The naming of the country as "Burma" or "Myanmar" is a complex issue (Lintner 2007). As many Burma/Myanmar observers have noted in recent years, the distinction does not clearly signal a political position any more. I will use "Myanmar project" or "Myanmar training center" to refer to the OISCA project based on OISCA's own official naming of the projects, and Burma/Myanmar to refer to the country in general. If I am quoting a Burmese person, I will use "Myanmar" since that is the way that Burmese people I spoke to referred to the country. I note that this does not indicate my neutrality but rather an attempt to downplay the issue of naming that I worry flattens the nuances of the actual politics relating to Burma/Myanmar today. I will use the term "Burmese" as a short hand to refer to citizens in Burma/Myanmar, regardless of ethnicity, nevertheless keeping in mind that citizenship exclusions and ethnicity are serious issues in the country, as recent news about violence against Rohingya people demonstrate.

immoral. He told me that there was little talk about “international aid” or “development studies” per se.

He confessed that he did not know that OISCA was related to a religious organization until he joined this short-term training course. OISCA’s founder, Yonosuke Nakano, had created a Shinto-based new religion called Ananaikyō before establishing OISCA. Although OISCA itself was not registered as a religious group, the influences of Ananaikyō were evident throughout the organization, such as in the training that Takai experienced at the vocational college. Seeing the Shinto shrine in the school property and having to participate in the daily chanting of Shinto prayers (*norito*), Takai realized that he might have come to a truly strange place. “I was seriously scared that I might not leave this place alive!... A few years earlier there was the Aum incident, which had made our allergies against religion, among young generations, even stronger.”<sup>4</sup>

However, he told me, as time passed he gradually changed his mind. “You know when you’re a child and adults tell you that the sun is watching you if you do something wrong? They told us that things like this were Shinto teachings. So what they said was not that complicated or weird after all,” he explained. He eventually resolved his resistance and came to the conclusion that learning about these religious affiliations and philosophies simply showed him what was at the root of OISCA’s activities. The influences of Ananaikyō were historical and nothing more, he decided. “But then,” he said uncertainly, “if we think about it, many NGOs in other countries are

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<sup>4</sup> In 1995, members of the Aum Shinrikyō religious group attacked several subway lines using sarin gas, killing thirteen people and injuring thousands of others. The general public has come to see religious organizations in Japan, especially new religions, with increased suspicion after this terrorist attack.

Christian, so maybe in the end, somewhere, there is a connection [between religion and aid work].”

Takai explained that his ambivalence about OISCA’s religious background was part of a more general sense of incomprehension among young Japanese staff. He said:

Once you start working at the training centers, for young people who are interested in international aid or development work in the normal sense of the word, it’s going to be an unbearable amount of agricultural labor everyday... Many of the young people who joined OISCA at the same time that I did were interested in NGO management and such, and they quit in a year or so. [Personal communication, November 4, 2009]

I asked him what made it so difficult to work at the training centers. He described how staff and trainees live and work together for a year under the same roof at the training centers, and so staff have to set an example, waking up at dawn in time for the morning disciplinary exercises and roll-call (*tenko*), getting to meals at the set times, participating in cleaning duties, leading the agricultural work and field classes, giving lectures, and tending the fields. In that sense, Takai explained, trainees are constantly watching staff, and there is no rest. Even Sundays were taken up by administrative tasks and other daily chores. Life becomes contained within the training center, and other social ties are nearly erased. At the same time, Takai was also clearly drawn to the kind of relational proximity that such an environment produced.

He admitted, “I always carry inside myself a sense of struggle (*kattō*) about my work in OISCA, and sometimes I wonder if there is any meaning to all of this.” He continued:

But what I like is that, even though it is difficult, there are many things that you can’t understand if you don’t spend all day with other people. Teaching “spiritual” (*seishin*) things to trainees depends on how you yourself are acting. For example, are you taking off your slippers neatly? Are you properly changing slippers for the first and second floors? There are many things in OISCA that have nothing to do with development aid. But then, trainees are really watching closely when someone doesn’t do these things or follow the communal rules, and they point it out! They



would say, “*Sensei* (teacher), you said this, but why aren’t you doing it yourself?” I think, “Oh you are so annoying... but you are so right.” So I have come to realize that *I* have to act properly... Being together with others all the time is a really difficult thing, but the difficulty of human relationships is part of the learning process here. [Personal communication, November 4, 2009]

Despite his various misgivings, he had come to accept certain things about OISCA, such as the necessity to take off one’s slippers in a certain way, as an important rule to uphold and share with other staff and trainees. He had found meaning in the daily struggle to live alongside other staff and trainees at the training center, even going so far as to tell me that the Tokyo headquarter office was “not really OISCA.” That is, it was not OISCA without the struggle to live and work within intimate relations.

This was what stayed with me: the sense of daily battles in proximate relations with others—other Japanese and non-Japanese staff, Ananaikyō members, and trainees from around the world with whom he had to share his life in intimate ways—that shaped his commitment to OISCA. His dedication to the work seemed to depend on its limits, on the sense that he might give up any day in the face of the relentless challenges of living intimately with others.



Figure 1: Outdoor shoes stored away at a training center.

Tracing OISCA's activities in Japan and Burma/Myanmar, one of its newest overseas projects, my aim in this dissertation is to understand how OISCA's Japanese and Burmese aid workers, as well as trainees from around the world, understood international aid work through the production and the cultural politics of aspirations to create relational proximity. In Japan, development and humanitarian activities are usually grouped under the label "international cooperation" (*kokusai kyōryoku*). Thus, the government aid agency is called Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the most prominent NGO network organization is called the Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC). As I elaborate in chapter one, the sociologist Shū Kitano (2011) analyzes the historical development of the concept of international cooperation, and contrasts its use with other related terms such as international development (*kokusai kaihatsu*), Official Development Assistance (ODA), economic cooperation (*keizai kyōryoku*), and so on. His argument is that the term has served to depoliticize aid in Japan. In this dissertation I reorient his view to the micro-relations of "international cooperation" to examine how the aspirations to create proximate relationships between Japanese and non-Japanese aid workers and trainees actually generate acute political, historical, and sociocultural tensions. Aid work as international cooperation is defined by the ways that different aid actors negotiate these tensions in the ambivalences of intimate relations.

While international humanitarian and development work is commonly understood to consist of scale-making projects that reach for globality, another coexistent ideology of aid is the need to demonstrate relational proximity, and even "solidarity," with local communities. Ethnographies of European NGOs and UN missions show how humanitarian actors struggle to maintain distance with local

communities in order to stay mobile and cosmopolitan, at the same time that proximity with local actors is an aspiration that is often an impossibility (Feldman 2010; Redfield 2012). But if relational proximity is attenuated or generative of difficult dilemmas for humanitarian actors in emergency situations, it is a conspicuous aim and modality in OISCA's agricultural training activities. Moreover, proximity is not simply a positive value to embrace that eludes impersonal bureaucracies of aid or corrects the politics of humanitarian hierarchy. The aspirations for proximity among OISCA's aid actors were not so much in opposition to mobility; the quandary of proximity emerged in the politics of difference and erasure within intimate relations themselves.

Peter Redfield's (2012) analysis of a French NGO points to this politics of proximity in humanitarianism. Numerous aid practitioners and observers point out that the reality or threat of failure of humanitarian ideals and intentions is always present, creating a dilemma or a "double-bind" for aid actors (Feldman 2007; James 2010: 90; Mertz and Timmer 2010; see also de Waal 1998; Fortun 2001; Kennedy 2004; Rieff 2002; Terry 2002). These studies are concerned with the ways that aid actors are pulled in opposite directions by humanitarian ideals and political realities, moral universal commitments and the exigencies of particular situations at hand. The notion of the double-bind derives from Gregory Bateson and colleagues who identified a characteristic of the schizophrenic as someone who is caught in the following situation: *"The child is punished for discriminating accurately what [the mother] is expressing, and he is punished for discriminating inaccurately...* By preventing the child from talking about the situation, the mother forbids him using the metacommunicative level" (Bateson et al. 1972[1956]: 215). In this sense, the double-bind is not simply a breakdown in communication, but a situation of struggle in the impossibility of making a correct judgment. Applying this concept to the study of international aid, Peter Redfield (2012)

has recently taken up these works on the double-bind in his analysis of the French medical NGO, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), to show how contradictory injunctions—such as the commitment to global mobility and the imperative to build proximate relations with local communities—demand impossible responses from MSF workers, who nevertheless strive to choose to do the right thing, causing them turmoil and distress.

The issue of humanitarian principles failing or exacerbating conditions of suffering and violence in practice is certainly a concern among aid actors, but I believe that it is important to distinguish this paradox from the double-bind and note that the breakdown of ideals in practice, theories in reality, is not what the latter is about. The MSF workers in Redfield's ethnography struggled in the contradictory demands of their organizational principles and the conditions of local context, and what I find interesting in this scenario is the fact that it is a moment of inter-contextual conflict. In other words, if we take seriously Redfield's use of the double-bind, what appears is an incongruence between different but conceptually adjacent sociocultural, political, and historical contexts.

In short, as Bateson's later writings on the double-bind indicate, I argue that what is productive in the concept is not that it describes a condition of failure—that is, the impossibility of abstract injunctions—but the fact that double-binds are “experienced breaches in the weave of contextual structure” (Bateson 1972[1969]: 276). He explains that these ruptures of context create “transcontextual syndromes,” conditions in which “there is always or often a ‘double take’,” and for this person, “a falling leaf, the greeting of a friend, or a ‘primrose by the river’s brim’ is not ‘just that and nothing more’” (Bateson 1972[1969]: 272). I suggest that the perspective of the “double-take,” more so than the “double-bind,” points to the creative potential of such

contextual disruptions. In trying to negotiate relational conflicts in the aspirations to create proximity, as I illustrate in the case of OISCA, the double-take can be a difficult but transformative moment, turning our attention to the effects of such struggles in bringing two or more possible worlds in view, not just a binding condition of distress in the person's, or organization's, interior worlds.

Following from the double-take, I point to the double-edged effects of aspiring for proximity, that is, to its ambivalence. I argue that the politics of ambivalence lies in the insidious yet alluring nature of aspiring for intimate relations. As Takai demonstrated above, and as I argue further below, "the field" (*gamba*) of international aid work is messy and indeterminate—in the words of OISCA Japanese staff members, it is "muddy" (*doro doro*) (see chapter three). This muddiness emerges out of the struggles to establish proximity with others, an endeavor that is both meaningful and violent for the different aid actors involved. A number of anthropologists and development scholars have begun to address the fact that the profession of aid work is driven by personal aspirations and commitments, not simply caught in structures of power (Eyben 2012; McKinnon 2007; Quarles van Ufford and Giri 2003; Yarrow 2008a). They are careful to point out that this is not about opposing such personal sentiments against wider historical and social processes; what they aim to demonstrate is that these domains are interlinked in the constitution of international aid.<sup>5</sup> What the perspective

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<sup>5</sup> Their approach to aspiration in aid work differs from those who have argued that aspiration, or the "capacity to aspire," is another resource in the neoliberal capitalist structure of international development or modernity in general, for better or for worse (Fabian 2002; Feher 2009; Ferguson 2002; Mosse 2010; Rose 1989; Rudnyckyj 2010; cf. Appadurai 2004; Nussbaum 2003). While the undercurrent of neoliberal or other systemic forces are not denied, the study of aid work as a navigation of aspirations that are anchored in the daily practices of aid is less predetermined in its conclusions of causality. In fact, causality, or the encompassment of one within the other, is not the concern here. This view of aspirations also differs from the literature on hope. If hope demonstrates an open-ended orientation and a reorientation of one's knowledge (Miyazaki 2004), aspirations for proximity were aimed toward narrower horizons.

on aid work as an aspirational endeavor shows is how affective investments exist alongside systems of inequality, neither of which are instruments or contradictions to the other.

A number of anthropologists have studied the centrality of ambivalence in institutional actors' motivations, and how such ambivalences simultaneously enact and question certain knowledge regimes (Miyazaki 2003, 2007, 2012; Whitmarsh 2008; Zaloom 2003). These studies are different from the analyses of paradoxes and contradictions in expert practices because they trace the ways that ethnographic actors themselves grapple with the gaps in understanding. Ambivalence in this sense is also not about vagueness or indecisiveness, but rather, about struggles with the dual conflicting effects of things. The ethnographies demonstrate how actors play with different epistemological categories and contextual domains, creating a productive partiality and doubleness within the institution itself that forms the structure of the dynamism of relations, subjectivities, and forms of knowledge (see also Cannell 1999; Haraway 1991; Strathern 2004[1991]). In this sense, the double-edgeness of ambivalence makes it so that critique, a different perspective, is always already written into the institution and system itself. At the same time, however, ambivalence also has slippery political effects, as forms of governance come hand-in-hand with compassion, and intimacy comes entangled with violence (cf. Muehlebach 2009). Thus, I demonstrate throughout the dissertation that, as much as aid actors' aspirations for proximity threaten to erase differences that are incompatible with the dominant imagination of the intimate unit, the enthralling promise of human intimacy makes outright rejection difficult.

Thus, the question is: how do we critically engage with ethnographic subjects inhabiting multiple spheres—of societies, cultures, generations, philosophies—without

presuming that they exhibit a “paradox” contra our assumptions? How do we produce an analytic of ambivalence that accounts for aspirations as much as violence? What I aim to show throughout the chapters is the extent of the possibilities for internal critique in the ambivalence of aspiring for proximity—cultural, social, and historical multiplicities that obviate final interpretations.

Takai expressed a sense of struggle (*kattō*) between his understanding of development work and OISCA’s approach to aid, between his expectations of secularism and Ananaikyō’s influences in OISCA. The daily conflicts that he described in his life at the training centers were also about cultural frictions between trainees from around the world and himself. Similarly, Koike, the director of the Shikoku training center, once told me:

I think of OISCA as a social movement that people join because they agree with Yonosuke Nakano’s vision of world peace, and think that the things that Japan can offer to the world, Japanese ways of thinking and attitudes, can contribute to this world peace... But this is not a one-way street; *hitozukuri* (“making persons”) [through the training programs] is about the mutual improvement of all people who participate, including myself. At first, I focused on the act of “teaching,” but now I realize that people are transformed by sharing the different backgrounds that overseas trainees bring to the training center, by trying to understand each other... There is this different kind of culture, that way of eating. We are all stimulated by each other (*shigeki wo atae au*), and as a result, both staff and trainees are made as persons. [Personal communication, April 22, 2010]

Koike told me this in the middle of an interview in which she emphasized the various changes that she had introduced to the training center. She was a former JICA employee who was hired at the Shikoku training center, and she was made director of the training center in five years. It was rare for a non-Ananaikyō staff to hold a senior position in OISCA, and even more so to have a director with previous professional experience in international aid work. She was also the first female director of a training center in fifty years. The other Japanese senior staff and directors of training centers for

the most part belonged to Ananaikyō or had joined OISCA as young men—senior staff were all men except Koike—and had arrived to their senior post after decades of working and living in OISCA.

In contrast, as young staff at the Shikoku training center and elsewhere told me, Koike was an “outsider” who revitalized the organization with her new perspectives, changing the culture of the training center in various ways. For example, Koike herself told me that OISCA’s training programs in Japan tended to place heavy emphasis on practicum in the fields, with very few lectures. Trainees from around the world who had expected to learn high levels of agricultural skills, experimental methods in organic farming, and cutting edge theories in Japan, were always greatly disappointed when they arrived in OISCA. In addition, Koike explained, the “practicum” often seemed to be more like chores (*sagyō*), and all free time was filled with menial tasks around the training center such as cleaning and cooking. Thus, Koike gradually changed the curriculum to include more theory, more lectures from experts outside of OISCA, and fieldtrips to various farms and industries to make the training more about teaching rather than about accomplishing daily chores. Older staff who were resistant at first, she told me, came to accept her interventions when they saw that the changes would not affect the cooking, cleaning, and running of the training center.

In light of Koike’s positionality, her statement seemed to be an expression of her struggle over the years in trying to make sense of OISCA through her intimate relationships with social and cultural others at the training center. Although she had come to some resolution about her incomprehension of OISCA’s organizational culture, a replication of the sense of shock vis-à-vis OISCA had occurred in her view of her relationship with non-Japanese trainees. Specifically, her words suggested that ideas of



“Japaneseness” and cultural difference went hand in hand with her sense of proximity with cultural others.

In this light, it becomes clear that the aspirations for proximity are not only about transformative possibilities. The cultural politics of the ways that aid actors define “difference” are also significant because the impetus to create proximity hinges on particular ideas of bridging difference. Senior Japanese staff members in OISCA tended to emphasize “cultural difference” above all else, thereby excluding other kinds of difference from OISCA’s activities. In particular, as I elaborate below, and as I show in subsequent chapters, the stress on “Japaneseness” was the first step in processes of “culture shock” that undergirded the dominant construction of aspirations for proximity. For example, as I describe in chapter two, all training centers began with a morning disciplinary exercise, and its militaristic effect rattled many young Japanese and new trainees. Senior Japanese staffers explained these practices as expressions of “Japanese values,” and thus the unnerving experiences appeared as shocks of a “cultural” kind. Conversely, the framing of shocking experiences as cultural also enabled the identification of certain things as “Japanese” and other things as culturally foreign—in other words, the interpretation of differences as “cultural” bolstered “Japaneseness” and otherness, not the other way around. In this manner, senior Japanese staff attempted to eliminate the various kinds of difference that cut through the “community” of OISCA. Only cultural difference mattered, and senior Japanese staff constructed the aspirations for proximity out of these delimited views of difference. Culturalism and the value of relational proximity were cut out of the same cloth. Thus, one undercurrent throughout the dissertation will be the ways that notions of “cultural difference” erased other kinds of difference among the various aid workers and trainees.

Then, how do the different aid actors in OISCA continue to aspire for intimate relations amongst themselves, despite it all, and to what effect? How do relationships in aid work enact aspirations for other worlds, other lives, and other futures? What are the consequences of the persistent attention to proximate relations in OISCA? If analyses of aid have overlooked the role of relations and cultural interactions in the constitution of development and humanitarianism, what is at stake in bringing to light the centrality of such aspiring relations in cultural encounters of aid in this dissertation?

### **“Making Persons”**

Takai claimed that the daily relational struggles at the training centers defined OISCA’s approach to aid work. I contend that this value of intimate interpersonal struggles is what defines Japanese *hitozukuri* (“making persons”) aid in general. OISCA conducts training activities at four training centers in Japan and sixteen training centers around the Asia Pacific, the former for youth from around the world and the latter for young local villagers in the respective countries.<sup>6</sup> The year-long training courses aim to impart techniques of sustainable agriculture and “spiritual” qualities such as a hardworking attitude to trainees from around the world, mainly from rural parts of the Asia-Pacific region. The ultimate goal is to encourage these trainees to return to their home communities, and become leaders of development and environmental efforts based on OISCA’s philosophies, which include principles of harmony with nature, discipline, and collectivity over individuality.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Training centers in Japan are located in Aichi, Kagawa, Fukuoka, and Osaka prefectures. Training centers overseas are in Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar, East Timor, Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, and the Philippines. A training center is also being planned in Sri Lanka.

<sup>7</sup> A part of the OISCA Charter and organization mission states: “We recognize that all life-forms are closely interconnected and that their source is in the universe. We envision a world in

One important point of this dissertation is to disrupt the clear demarcations between international staff, local staff, and recipients of aid (trainees). In OISCA's training centers, most local staff, if not all, were former trainees, and in the Myanmar training center, they were all graduates of the training program and had spent at least an additional year at a training center in Japan. At the same time, some local staff members were sent to work at training centers or at the headquarter office in Japan, occupying the position of international staff. There was, undoubtedly, a shared sense of pride of "being OISCAns." Therefore, an analysis of the disparities between aid workers and aid recipients, between local and international staff, needs to be considered alongside the shared sense of purpose, aspirations, and professional pride.

The training centers in Japan are located in Aichi prefecture, Fukuoka prefecture, and Kagawa prefecture. There is another training center in Osaka, but it only hosts trainees on their way to train at nearby factories and small companies, and its function differs from the main training programs in OISCA. Thus, it was not a subject of my project. As I describe in further detail in chapter two, OISCA's trainings are demanding, starting at dawn with disciplinary exercises and following a daily schedule that leaves little time for rest or privacy. Staff and trainees live together at the training centers, sharing meals, communal baths, and collective duties such as cleaning. The emphasis is on learning to live in a communal environment. There are some lectures in classrooms, but most of the agricultural training happens in the fields. Thus, from the moment that one wakes up to the moment that one goes to sleep, the day is full of

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which people coexist beyond differences in nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, and culture, and strive to protect and nurture the basis of life on this earth... As a way to realize this vision, we have chosen the work of cultivating people who can put to action the efforts toward the coexistence of all life on earth, with a heart that is grateful to the fact that we are allowed to live thanks to the benefits granted to us by the universe." [OISCA, n.d., <http://www.oisca.org/about/>, accessed January 29, 2013.]

activity and labor alongside other people. As one trainee from Turkey at one of the training centers in Japan told me, “It’s hard to find a place to rest and be alone at the training center, even in the toilet!” (personal communication, November 8, 2009).

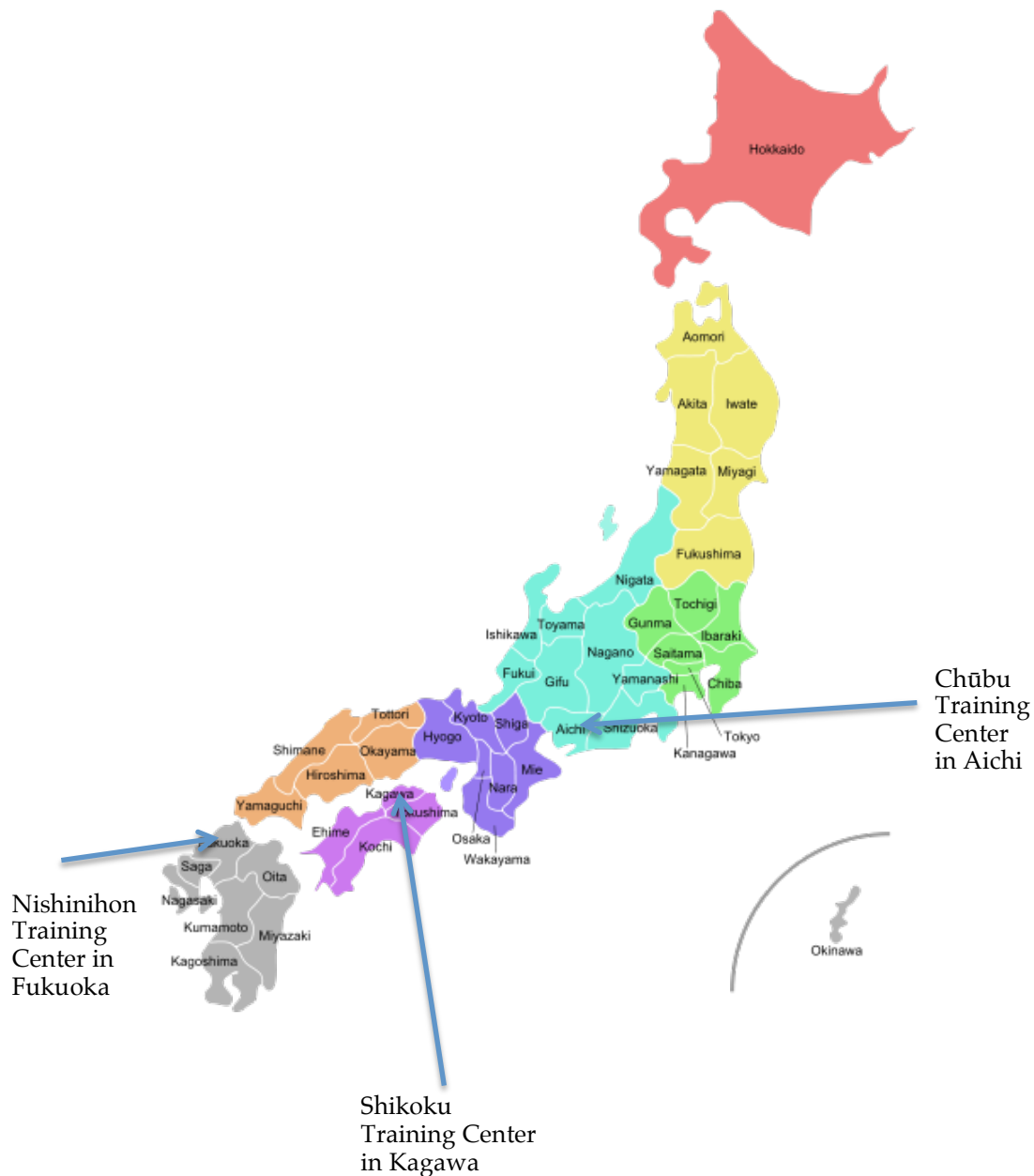


Figure 2: Map of OISCA training centers in Japan (Osaka training center is not marked).

Training programs overseas are similar in approach and schedule. Accordingly, the training center in Burma/Myanmar where I conducted the second half of my fieldwork also followed a demanding daily routine, although lunch break was longer due to the hot weather and thus the day felt less rushed. The Myanmar project was established in 1996 in Yesagyo Township near the town of Pakokku in the Dry Zone of upper Burma/Myanmar. In 1997, the year-long training programs (May to March) began.

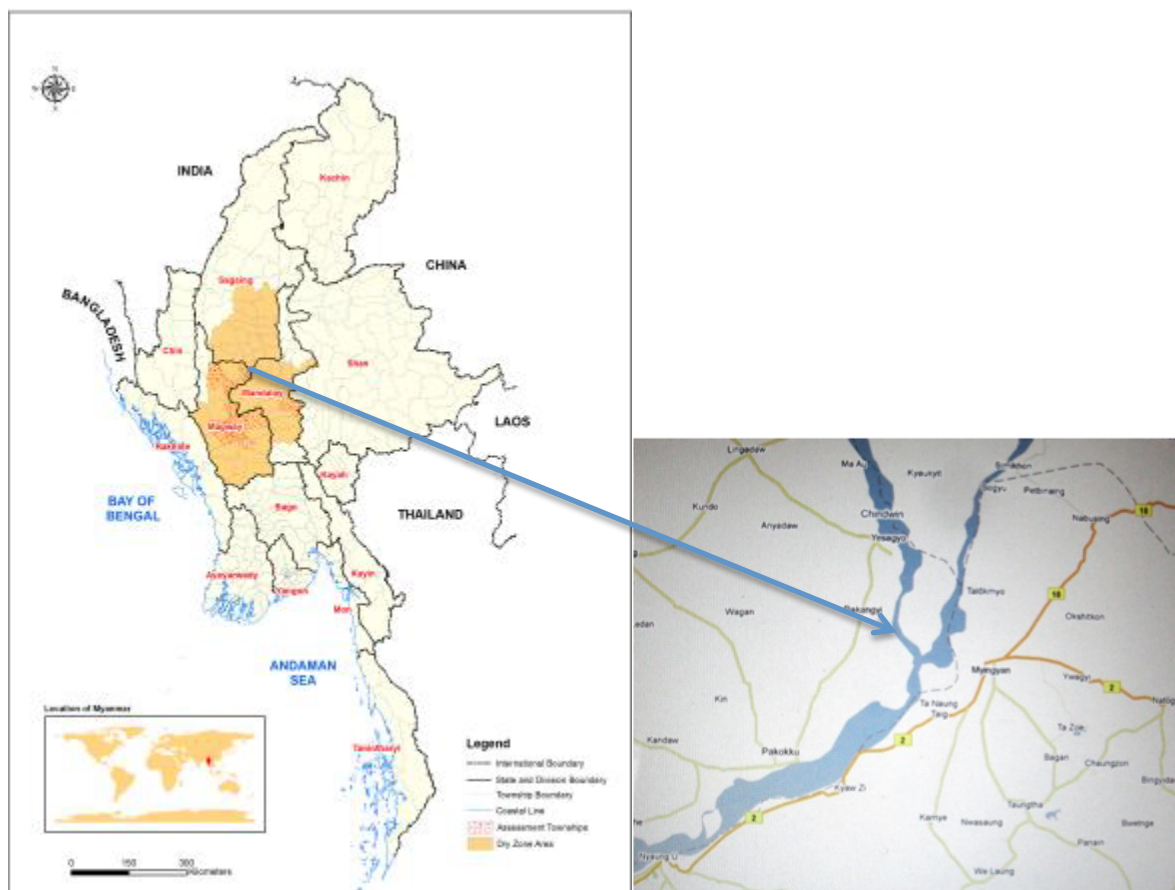


Figure 3: The Dry Zone and the OISCA Myanmar training center in Yesagyo Township.

Every year, the Japanese director and the Burmese staff in charge of trainings select 10 boys and 10 girls around the ages of 18 to their mid-twenties from various regions in Burma/Myanmar to teach them skills in organic farming. These young

trainees are mostly ethnically Burman, but there are always two or three youth from ethnic minority areas such as Kachin or Chin State. The recruitment of trainees happens mainly through the Myanma Agriculture Service (MAS), a department of the Myanmar government, which posts announcements at its regional offices or spreads the word through contacts.<sup>8</sup> Sometimes young people apply through family contacts or neighbors in their village who recommend that they attend the training course. A few are from nearby villages in Yesagyo Township. Most of the trainees are from middle-income farming families. Thus, unlike many other NGOs in Burma/Myanmar, OISCA tends to recruit better-off youth whose families have some kind of connection to the government or to local leadership.

The training center currently covers over 18.5 acres, divided into two areas: one containing the living quarters, dining hall, office building, a vegetable field, and the poultry sheds, and the other area across the road consisting of over 9 acres of rice paddy, additional vegetables fields, the pig sheds, and a kindergarten for local children.

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<sup>8</sup> The Myanma Agriculture Service (MAS) exists within the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MOAI) and is responsible for coordinating agricultural research and extension activities in Burma/Myanmar. OISCA's Myanmar training center is officially co-operated by OISCA and MAS (see chapter four for background).





Figure 4: The OISCA Myanmar training center's living quarters.



Figure 5: Rice paddies at the OISCA Myanmar training center

Over the years, agricultural operations and the training curricula have expanded to include sustainable poultry and pig farming, as well as food processing (i.e. baking

breads and sweets). The former and first director of the Myanmar training center, whom I call Kawaguchi, explained to me that he decided to start animal husbandry in order to secure manure for organic rice and vegetable cultivation. Thus, in addition to raising chicks and piglets that are then sold to nearby villagers, the chicken and pigs produce precious manure that is used for making bokashi organic fertilizer or directly folded into the soil.<sup>9</sup>

For the last few years, the center has managed to create enough revenue to sustain itself without external funds, selling eggs, piglets, bokashi fertilizer, rice seeds, and other products, while also cutting operational costs. In 2005, OISCA Myanmar began to undertake WFP projects, conducting Food for Work, Food for Training, and Food for Education projects through which they provided nearby villages, respectively, work in infrastructural construction, trainings in agriculture and other topics, and incentives for children to attend school, all in exchange for the distribution of rice. As of 2010, the training center had only one Japanese staff, with another Japanese staff in the Yangon office, and over forty Burmese staff at the training center.

At first glance, OISCA might not appear to be a development or a humanitarian organization; although it does participate in WFP and other more conventionally understood “development” projects, its focus is on agricultural training activities that generally take place within the physical boundaries of the training centers. Nevertheless, training programs have been a part of international aid efforts, particularly in Japanese approaches to aid that are based on *hitozukuri*, and in this sense, I suggest that OISCA exemplifies a type of international aid that focuses on forming

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<sup>9</sup> Bokashi is made from biodegradable waste matter that is broken down by microorganisms, and is widely used today in organic or natural methods of agriculture as a non-chemical fertilizer that can restore or enhance the quality of the soil. At the Myanmar training center, it is a mixture of chicken excrement, rice bran, oil scraps, ash, soil, water, and bokashi seed made from effective microorganisms (EM).



particular subjects such as in “capacity building” activities (but see chapter four for their differences). Furthermore, in times of humanitarian crisis such as after Cyclone Nargis in 2008 in Burma/Myanmar, OISCA has carried out what would be considered conventional “humanitarian” projects as well, distributing relief items.

While I understand the concern with keeping the conceptual terrains of humanitarianism and development distinct despite their operational overlaps (Redfield and Bornstein 2010), it is useful to consider international aid activities in reference to both perspectives. To reiterate, my interest is in the cultural politics of social and interpersonal relations in the practice of aid work, a basic aspect of global aid activities that I argue has been largely sidestepped in analyses of development and humanitarianism. Since James Ferguson’s defining study in the anthropology of development, *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1994), numerous ethnographies of aid organizations have appeared, from the World Bank (Goldman 2005) to World Vision (Bornstein 2005). Following Ferguson, a strand of these studies has followed Foucauldian analyses of discourse, power, and governmentality, demonstrating how aid organizations are part of a global regime of governance that uses particular techniques of depoliticization, spatialization, and self-regulatory subjectivity, for example, even if these are found to always remain incomplete (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Li 2007; Sharma 2006). These studies, often labeled as “post-development” approaches, have provided important analyses of the ways that international aid subjects people in developing countries to global systems of government and inequality, and produce particular modern subjects both among aid institutions and local communities (Cooper and Packard 1997; Escobar 1995; Sachs 1992).

A recent group of anthropologists have distanced themselves from such critiques of development, however, arguing that approaches such as discourse analysis and

governmentality tend to underspecify analyses of institutional configurations of power or overdetermine the various actual practices of aid work (Elyachar 2005; Mosse and Lewis 2005). Accordingly, recent alternative directions of inquiry engage more actively with practitioners of development, and examine bottom-up perspectives on how practices make policy, or focus on relationships as constitutive of aid work (Eyben 2006, 2010, 2012; Fechter 2012; Heuser 2012; Mosse 2005; Roth 2012). Following earlier approaches to development aid that took seriously the cultural politics and practices of knowledge production in aid relations (Pigg 1996, 1997, 2001), there is a growing community of scholars and practitioners who problematize anthropology's stance outside and above development aid practices that Foucauldian approaches to development aid implied. Instead, they engage ethnographically and critically with the knowledge practices and social processes of aid work, attempting "to reveal the moral and social worlds in which ideas of development are made meaningful, without becoming apologists for those that we study" (Yarrow and Venkatesan 2012: 8; see also Green 2009). This is a group of scholars who are beginning to take seriously the fact that aid work is a form of labor and of life, attending to the blurring boundary between personal and professional realms and to the multiplicity of "aid workers," and argue that the experiences and processes of this labor in fact impacts the outcomes of aid (Fechter and Hindman 2011). This dissertation follows and contributes to these ethnographic approaches to aid work; furthermore, it adds the perspective of relational proximity through which aid actors negotiate concepts of difference and connectivity in the constitution of aid work as transformative labor.

The Japanese staff at OISCA often described the training activities as *hitozukuri*, literally meaning "making persons." As I elaborate in chapter four, *hitozukuri* is a term that has been used widely in Japanese international aid efforts, including JICA whose

motto had long been “Making Persons, Making Nations, Heart-to-Heart Contact” (*Hitozukuri, Kunizukuri, Kokoro no Fureai*). Yet, understandings of *hitozukuri* has been in flux, ranging from definitions that focus on human resource development activities to emphases on cultivating international relationships. Although OISCA staff also did not seem to agree on a precise definition of the term, there was a general understanding that the training program was not only aimed at teaching agricultural techniques to trainees but also at developing their character as persons and leaders of community development—that is, at “making persons” as a whole. Another commonly expressed view was that *hitozukuri* was not only for trainees, but also for the Japanese and local staff. Everyone involved in OISCA’s activities were expected to engage in “making” themselves, particularly through the intimate interactions with others that life and work at the training centers demanded. As such, what I discovered was that “making persons” was in fact about aspiring and making intimate relations.

Although I began the study of OISCA’s *hitozukuri* work thinking that I would be analyzing practices of subject-formation, usual accounts of similar activities did not quite seem to apply. For example, the disciplinary practices described in chapter two might recall Michel Foucault’s (1977) studies of discipline in penitentiary settings, but I argue that the emphasis on discipline in OISCA did not produce complete subjects of a particular kind. In fact, what was highlighted in the disciplinary exercises was the sense of dislocation and unease due to the anachronistic form of the practices that reminded young Japanese staff of discomfiting memories of the Second World War (see chapter two). The evaluative standard of morality itself was questioned, participants asking: “why should anyone care about these practices in the first place?” As such, *hitozukuri* through discipline entailed an expectation that one would change by struggling with demands that could not be easily understood or accepted.

Thus, I suggest that *hitozukuri* is not quite like the embodied formation of ethical subjects in which subjects measure themselves against accepted ideals of traditional virtue or moral standards to achieve a particular bodily habitus (Foucault 1984; Kondo 1990; Lester 2005; Mahmood 2005; Pandian 2009; Zigon 2007). Neither is it quite an example of either Foucauldian poststructuralist ethics or “first-person” neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics as schematized by Cheryl Mattingly (2012; see also Lambek 2010). The distinction is useful in understanding how the former approach tends to view ethics as a deliberative moment that involves technologies of self-care that challenge everyday moral codes, while the latter perspective “is focused not only upon the practices of moral subjectivation... [but also on] the problem of action itself, with the doing of ordinary life... in which the moral good is often challenging to discern and more challenging to achieve” (Mattingly 2012: 179). Although I do see *hitozukuri* aid as a project of morality and ethical subject-formation, I suggest that the case of OISCA presents a situation in which “the moral ordinary” itself is uncertain, multiple, and contested (Mattingly 2012: 177). Specifically, the framework of “making persons” was in the ambivalent struggles of relationships in which cultural, social, generational, and other differences intersected among the various aid actors in OISCA, not quite accepted universally as fixed standards of the moral or ordinary. I do posit that most staff and trainees understood aid work in OISCA to be a transformative endeavor, but not vis-à-vis accepted moral codes; rather, the moral ordinary itself was fluid as the different effects of proximate relations made the value of proximity itself ambivalent.

### **Situating OISCA**

OISCA is one of the oldest international NGOs in Japan, established in 1961, and is known for its training programs in sustainable agriculture for rural youth around the

world and its environmental projects such as reforestation activities. The environmental projects include the Children's Forest Program (CFP) started in 1991, in which children plant trees at their schools or other locations in their communities, mangrove reforestation projects, and other environmental education activities.<sup>10</sup> The organization has grown to become one of the most prominent international NGOs in Japan. According to a study conducted by JANIC (2007), as of 2004 there were over 270 NGOs in Japan, and OISCA was listed as one of the oldest and largest organizations with a revenue of over 1 billion yen (11 million U.S. dollars).



Figure 6: OISCA Tokyo headquarters (one out of the two buildings).

As JANIC explains in the same report, NGO-type activities in Japan are said to have started during the beginning of the second Sino-Japanese war, when Christian doctors and medical students went to China in 1938 to help those affected by the

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<sup>10</sup> OISCA conducts numerous activities related to reforestation and other environmental issues, some of which are undertaken as part of the activities at the training centers. Others are conducted as small-scale one-time projects by former trainees. In 2011, these environmental activities took place in Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, China, East Timor, Ethiopia, Fiji, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, Thailand, Pakistan, Palau, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Uruguay.

Japanese invasion.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, there was a twenty-year blank during the Second World War and the immediate postwar years, but by the 1960s, organizations that could be called NGOs in the contemporary sense appeared. These included the Japan Overseas Christian Medical Cooperative Service (JOCS) established in 1960, an agricultural aid organization which became the Christian-based Asia Rural Institute (ARI) founded in 1960, and OISCA, which began its international agricultural aid activities in 1961.

Although they are undoubtedly precursors to future NGOs, it is difficult to clearly label them as such, given that until the Law to Promote Specific Nonprofit Activities (the “NPO Law”) was passed in 1998, the only form of legal incorporation available for such groups was to register as a public interest corporation (*kōeki hōjin*), either as an incorporated association (*shadan hōjin*) or an incorporated foundation (*zaidan hōjin*), both of which require large initial funds and inside connections with bureaucrats in order to move the approval process along smoothly (Reimann 2010: 36-37). This legal and institutional restriction, as well as the unfavorable taxation environment, meant that civic and nonprofit groups were tightly regulated by the state, and organizations that successfully became incorporated associations or foundations, such as OISCA, were often seen as extensions or coopted agents of the state (Avenell 2009; Ogawa 2009; Pekkanen 2006; Pharr 2003; Reimann 2010; Yamamoto 1998). Indeed, as I will elaborate in chapter one, OISCA became an incorporated foundation relatively quickly thanks to the support it received from powerful conservative politicians: it became an incorporated foundation in 1969, and began receiving government subsidies (*kokko hojokin*) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1972,

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<sup>11</sup> Although it is not within the scope of this study, another early form of international aid was the Japan Red Cross officially established in 1887 (Kosuge 2003; Kurosawa and Kawai 2009).

beginning with 37 million yen the first year (about 123,000 US dollars) and growing to 163 million yen by 1985 (about 680,000 US dollars).

What can one of the oldest international NGOs in Japan, which has enjoyed the support of politicians, bureaucrats, and other prominent public figures for over half a century, tell us about Japanese international aid? If the Japanese state's control of civic movements primarily led to the creation of small local groups at the expense of large, independent, professionalized organizations (Pekkanen 2003), I suggest that OISCA presents a unique case in that it has been a large organization from relatively early on, and has been neither purely an agent of the state nor completely independent from it. It is telling, for example, that Toshiki Kaifu, a politician and one-time prime minister who was also involved in the founding of JOCV, wrote in an OISCA magazine article that he considered OISCA to be a stimulating sister organization to JOCV (Kaifu 1968). Thus, although OISCA has not simply been an extension of state interests, it is neither an expression of anti-state movements, as some scholars have said of NGOs in Japan (Hirata 2002; Murai 2000). In fact, I argue that such dichotomous analyses of NGOs and civic organizations that pervade studies of civil society in Japan do not capture the third space within which OISCA developed. I propose in chapter one that in this in-between positionality, OISCA was a pioneer in paving the way, however indirectly, for subsequent developments in Japanese international aid systems and NGOs.

At the same time, OISCA was clearly different from other aid agencies such as JOCV or JICA, or even other subsequent international NGOs. OISCA was established by Yonosuke Nakano, the founder of a Shinto-based new religion called Ananaikyō. As such, as I elaborate further in chapters one and two, OISCA's history began from international and national efforts that persons affiliated with Ananaikyō led. Accordingly, although OISCA received significant amounts of government subsidies,

the majority of its income relied on membership fees and other individual donations from OISCA members (*kaiin*) linked through Ananaikyō.

Moreover, Nakano established institutions and movements that were linked to OISCA-the-NGO, but engaged in activities unrelated to aid. Based on his philosophy of the universe in which he saw all life forms to be connected through the Great Spirit of the Universe (*uchū daiseishin*), throughout the late 1950s, Nakano established a number of astronomical observatories around Japan with the support of the prominent astronomer Issei Yamamoto from Kyoto University.<sup>12</sup>



月光天文台が発見し命名が承認された小惑星リスト				
	発見年月日	登録番号	命名	
日本語	1987.02.28	3843	OISCA	
(1) オイスカ	1988.12.11	4157	Izu	
(2) 伊豆	1989.01.28	4261	Gekko	
(3) 月光	1989.11.01	4293	Masumi	
(4) 真澄	1989.12.01	4383	Suruga	
(5) 駿河	1987.03.02	4403	Kuniharu	
(6) 国治	1989.10.23	4840	Otaynang	
(7) オテイナン	1989.01.01	5258	Yamatotakeru	
(8) 倭建	1988.03.07	5206	Kodomonomori	
(9) 子供の森	1989.11.29	5740	Tootoumi	
(10) 遠江	1988.10.13	5730	Yonosuke	
(11) 興之助	1988.03.24	9123	Yoshiko	
(12) 良子				

Figures 7: The Gekkō Observatory and the stars that were discovered there.

In 1968, Nakano also established the Astronomy Geology Technical School (*Tenmon chigaku senmon gakkō*), which were later reconfigured as the OISCA high school

<sup>12</sup> They did not know each other, and Nakano went to see Yamamoto out of the blue to offer his views that religion (*shūkyō*) is the teaching that shows people the universe. He indicated this by unpacking the Chinese characters for religion, *shū* being deconstructed to “universe” (*u-kanmuri*) and “show” (*shimesu*) and *kyō* meaning “teaching.” An official from Ananaikyō explained to me that Yamamoto was taken by Nakano’s words; they also shared the view that the universe has a *kokoro* (heart or mind) that could not be explained by science (personal communication, February 8, 2010). Furthermore, the writer, Aiko Satō, wrote a fictional book about a town that becomes embroiled in the controversies surrounding the establishment of an observatory by Ananaikyō members (Satō 1975). Today, only the Gekkō Observatory in Shizuoka remains.



and the OISCA College for Global Cooperation, a two-year vocational program for high school graduates interested in working in international aid, especially with OISCA-the-NGO. In addition, OISCA branches (*shibu*) were established across Japan, which have been responsible for recruiting new members, managing membership fees, and providing support to OISCA's overseas projects in financial, political, and other forms. There are currently fourteen OISCA branches.<sup>13</sup>

By the late 1960s, OISCA had established its training programs in the Asia-Pacific region and in Japan. As later chapters will show, although OISCA as an organization has gone through changes over its fifty-year history, there is an emphasis on "Japan" and ideas of "Japaneseness" that has persisted in different ways as the driving force of much of OISCA's training activities. The open, forceful emphasis on "Japanese values" was particularly salient in the first two decades of the organization. In an article from 1967 in the OISCA magazine, the owner of a factory in Fukuoka city in southern Japan writes about his experience sending thirty employees to the OISCA training center in Fukuoka for one-week trainings. Although nowadays OISCA trainings are geared primarily toward trainees from other countries, for the first three decades, Japanese youth were also targets of the training program and its disciplinary practices. The factory owner expresses amazement at the transformations that he saw in the young Japanese employees, who went from being sloppy (*osomatsu*) in words and action to acquiring sharpness in movement, a clear voice, and bright eyes full of life (*iki iki to shita me*). He writes:

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<sup>13</sup> The branches are in the prefectures of Hokkaido, Miyagi, Tokyo, Yamanashi, Nagano, Toyama, Shizuoka, Aichi, Gifu, Osaka, Hiroshima, Kagawa, Ehime, and Fukuoka. There are several more informal groups to support OISCA's activities. See "Shibu-Kenshū Center Ichiran [Overview of Branches and Training Centers]," OISCA, online text, <http://www.oisca.org/about/organization.html>, accessed January 29, 2013.

What was it that changed them so? Yes, it was the blood of the Japanese people that had been dormant in these youth's bodies that has been awakened by the passionate cries of the OISCA teachers. The dark veil covering the hearts and bodies of these young men has been torn down, youth who have grown up under the poisoned education system of the postwar years in which our people's history has been twisted, criticisms encouraged, the pride of being Japanese trashed, and the self-centered person hailed as democratization. Now, for the first time, the Japanese blood and soul has begun to flow through these young bodies that did not know Japan, as if they were foreigners. From this moment on, we can speak to each other, and the communication of our wills has begun. The disconnect with youth is causing the greatest tragedies of our times. [Yamada 1967: 26-7]

OISCA's training courses were seen as a way to shock and reawaken "Japaneseness" in Japanese youth, and the factory owner praised this as a way to revitalize young people and reconnect different generations. In this manner, between the 1960s and 1970s, OISCA embraced open expressions of nationalism, and even though in later years the discourse changed, the emphasis on "Japanese values" and ideas of "Japan" remained. At the same time, the generational rift that this factory owner mentions also continued to persist.

The combination of nationalistic positions and the stress on practices such as the morning disciplinary routines in the training (see chapter two) inevitably led to criticisms from outside observers. Many critics in Japan have raised alarm that OISCA and its affiliated institutions are "rightwing" (*uyoku*) organizations, a reaction that I myself saw when telling liberal Japanese scholars and intellectuals about my project. This was the criticism, for example, that appeared in popular magazines and news articles during the time when a Japanese OISCA staff in the Philippines was kidnapped. On May 29, 1990, Fumio Mizuno, the director of the training center on the island of Negros, was abducted by members of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines. He was released on August 2, but during

that time, Japanese journalists investigated OISCA's background, and several of them denounced what they found. For instance, the weekly tabloid magazine, *Shūkan Bunshun*, published an exposé in July 1990 that revealed the conservative, rightwing orientations of Ananaikyō and the OISCA high school (Shūkan Bunshun 1990). Both institutions, more than OISCA, have emphasized the importance of physical and spiritual discipline, reverence for the emperor, and adorned their walls with slogans from wartime Japan such as *hakkō ichiu*, which means "the eight corners of the world under the one heaven of benevolent imperial rule" and was used as a slogan for Japanese imperialism in the Second World War (Miwa 2007: 22; see also Hayashi 1987). Even though OISCA staff have asserted and continue to stress that they are a separate entity from Ananaikyō and the high school, given that they share the same founder, Yonosuke Nakano, that the subsequent and current leader of all these institutions is Yonosuke Nakano's adoptive daughter, Yoshiko Nakano, and that there continues to be a flow of personnel and relationships between these organizations, it is inevitable that observers have linked them closely.

At the same time, I do contend that the distinctions between Ananaikyō and OISCA, as well as between the nationalistic movements in the 1970s and OISCA-the-NGO's current aid activities, should not be collapsed. A young OISCA staff member whose family was Ananaikyō, and whose grandfather and mother had worked in OISCA, told me that he had a stronger sense of being "an OISCA family" rather than an "Ananaikyō family." "For example," he explained, "I remember going to eat with the foreign trainees at the training center as a child, and just being at the training center when my mother was working." He told me that, although he could not explain why, he did not think of Ananaikyō and OISCA as the same entities (personal communication, June 21, 2010). Moreover, unlike other religious groups in Japan that

engage in social welfare and international aid activities, Ananaikyō itself does not conduct social activities. In that sense, its purpose is quite different from OISCA.

But the issue is not simply that it would be inaccurate to collapse the two groups. I suggest that it would be analytically inappropriate because it would obscure the changes in the ways that “Japaneseness” was formulated in OISCA. For instance, a different formulation is visible in an OISCA magazine article from 1996. In this piece, an OISCA staff member relays the comments that he received from young newly-hired Japanese employees of various companies who completed short-term trainings at the OISCA training center in Aichi prefecture. During their stay, these Japanese youth lived with the regular trainees from around the world, and participated in the same activities and collective duties. The author explains that some participants at first did not understand the meaning of the militaristic, morning disciplinary exercises. But by the end, many of them saw the importance of what OISCA’s Japanese staff told them: what it means to be Japanese in a globalizing world, and the value of interacting intimately with trainees from other countries in arriving at this realization (S. Watanabe 1996: 16-7). In short, the staffer highlights the ways that the young Japanese participants of OISCA’s training program went through a transformation, from shock and resistance against the disciplinary practices and communal lifestyle to an awareness of the values of “Japaneseness” that arose in coming in close contact with non-Japanese trainees. In a similar way, during my fieldwork, several of the young Japanese staff explained to me that working through relationships with cultural others at the training centers made them see the values of Japan and “Japaneseness.” The reason they gave me was, as one of them explained to me, “You can’t value other countries if you can’t value your own, just as you can’t value other people if you can’t value yourself, right?” (personal communication, January 27, 2010).

Thus, over time, it seems that culturalist assertions came to be intertwined around claims of proximity with non-Japanese trainees and staff. OISCA's senior Japanese staff were aware of outsiders' criticisms of the organization, and the pressure led to the rearticulation of "rightwing" values. Specifically, national-culturalist notions of Japaneseness in OISCA began to emerge intertwined with ideas of cultural encounter, at the very edges of perceived cultural boundaries. For example, Yoshiko Nakano explains that OISCA's activities have been built on mistakes, struggles of trial-and-error in Japanese staff's relations with people in other countries. These mistakes, she writes, happened mainly because OISCA's Japanese staff forgot the local customs and rhythms of everyday life there. They learned, therefore, the importance of taking time, "standing at the same eye-level" as local people, and developing a spirit of perseverance and generosity in order to build human interactions (*ningen dōshi no kōryū*) (Nakano 2002: 168-69). An increasing number of Japanese staff members in recent years also express the importance of proximity with local communities and trainees, and the mutual transformations that such relations produce, as "Japanese values." A Japanese staffer writes in an article that OISCA's expert farmers, the older generation of Japanese staff, exhibit internationality (*kokusaisei*) precisely in what he calls their traditional, rural Japanese values of working closely with local communities and through an emphasis on manual labor rather than theory. These staff's activities are internationality in action, he writes, because their "Japaneseness" based on traditional approaches to agriculture that emphasize hard work in the fields create mutual understandings and proximate relations with local communities (Kameyama 2002). In this manner, national-culturalist claims of "Japaneseness" and the aspiration for proximity became enmeshed in dominant discourses in OISCA's training programs. Whereas OISCA could be

criticized for being militaristic or overly neo-imperialistic before, this change calls for a different form of critique.

### **Culture Shock OISCA**

OISCA was composed of a variety of actors—Japanese, non-Japanese, mixed race, elderly, young, religious, nonreligious, etcetera—but the multiple differences were ultimately subsumed under “cultural difference.” In fact, Japanese aid workers often referred to the term “culture shock” to describe the experience of working and training in OISCA. As everyone agreed—Japanese, non-Japanese, young, and old alike—the training centers were difficult places to live. Thus, Japanese staff always anticipated that the initial training period would be an experience of shock for trainees who came to Japan. Waking up everyday at dawn, participating in disciplinary morning routines that resembled military exercises, cleaning rooms and toilets on a daily basis, and spending all day working in the fields was not easy for anyone. A trainee from Sri Lanka at one of the training centers in Japan, Shanika, who had started her year at the OISCA training program a few weeks earlier, once told me, “This is not what I expected at a training program *in Japan*” (personal communication, March 1, 2010). She had spent all morning crying. This was a common comment I heard from other trainees who seemed to have expected a more modernized, comfortable, and technologically sophisticated approach to agricultural work and training. During my two-week stay on that trip, Shanika missed several morning routines, and even found herself unable to leave her bed for meals. One of the Japanese staff and I took turns taking her trays of food. One Japanese staff member explained to me that Shanika had asked to be allowed to leave at some point, but the staff convinced her to stay. This staffer told me that if Shanika could get past this initial stage, it would give her a great feeling of achievement

that would be valuable for the rest of her life. According to this staff member, every trainee responded to OISCA's approach to training differently, and it was always unpredictable how they would respond and adapt in the first few months—or not. But this was an important process because it taught trainees particular “Japanese values” of endurance, discipline, and collective harmony. Japanese staffers explained to me that these values would serve as models to help trainees develop their own communities and countries.

Although “culture shock” could be described as the foundation of anthropological inquiry, it is not a conceptual term that has been taken up by anthropologists beyond a few who use it in psychological studies that highlight conditions such as anxiety and frustration (Adler 1975; Furnham and Bochner 1986; Oberg 1960; Ward et al. 2001). It is arguably a term that is too broad, too vague, and decisively unfashionable. Yet, I invoke this modest term not to point to psychological, interiorized effects of a intercultural encounter, but rather in how its relational and social effects are employed in OISCA as a technique of cultural making and unmaking that define the experiences of struggling with relations in “the field” and aid work in general. Moreover, as I discuss later on, culture shock is what defines and unites my ethnographic endeavor with OISCA's labor.

I suggest that culture shock is in fact a central concept in training-based, *hitozukuri* aid activities in general. For example, the founder of the Asian Rural Institute (ARI, *Ajia Gakuin*), which also conducts training courses in organic agriculture for participants from around the Asia-Pacific at a training center in Japan, expounds on the concept of culture shock as a technique of aid. He describes how, one day, he saw one of the male trainees from Bangladesh crying his heart out, loudly and without restraint. He was shocked. He writes:

Since that culture shock of hearing that crying voice, I learned that, even in the act of “crying” which is so universal and natural for humanity, ways of crying and its timing can be extremely diverse depending on the person’s cultural traditions and social environment. I continue to hold a deep interest in this. [Takami 1996: 45]

He continues to explain his belief that culture shock has the power to liberate people from cultural binds, and transform people toward a better form of humanity (*ningensei*). Echoing OISCA, he describes how ARI invites people from over twenty countries every year for its year-long training course, and that the intimate living conditions sometimes causes conflicts. He writes that “we,” Japanese people, can learn a lot from these experiences of conflict with others:

In order to dialogue with others (*tasha*), we have to recognize that there are also foreign things (*ishitsu na mono*) inside of ourselves, and so we need to always have such dialogues within ourselves as well. I think that without that, we cannot dialogue with others. I think that Japanese people need to become persons (*ningen*) in this way very soon. [Takami 1996: 182]

What is striking about this statement for me is the awareness of “the other” that is internal to oneself, and the potential for self-transformation that this suggests. This is not a perspective that I found clearly articulated in OISCA, since OISCA’s Japanese staff did not refer to foreignness as something internal to themselves. The two organizations differ in their religious affiliations and their relationships to that, as well as in what is emphasized in the long-term collective lifestyles at the training centers.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, I argue that in the culture shock of the difficult, intimate relationships in OISCA’s activities, similar processes of cultural interaction and relational change were taking place. Similarly, in both cases, the expectation was not that only the non-Japanese

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<sup>14</sup> For example, while OISCA stresses discipline, ARI does not; while OISCA trainings are conducted in Japanese, ARI’s common language is English; while OISCA teaches trainees as a whole, ARI has trainees work in groups with rotating group leaders; while OISCA obscures its religious roots in the daily life of the training centers, ARI brings it to the fore.



trainees would suffer through culture shock, as the above examples suggest, but that the encounter was shocking for all parties involved, Japanese and non-Japanese alike. I argue that aid work in OISCA, which emphasized communal lifestyles and intimate relations, promised personal and collective transformations through the dynamism of such shock effects in relationships—that is, in relations constructed upon encounters of irresolvable cultural difference and endeavors to find forms of proximity across those differences. This is what makes national-culturalism and the aspirations for proximity two sides of the same coin. Ideologies of difference and proximity are inherently intertwined.

This dynamic of culture shock did not only happen between Japanese and non-Japanese actors, but also among Japanese staff as well. Shimizu, a woman in her mid-twenties explained to me that the religious Ananaikyō tendencies were strong at her training center, regularly having to take trainees to Ananaikyō ceremonies and make offerings of vegetables from the training center to the gods at the Ananaikyō temple. She also believed that there was an unstated rule that the directors of the training centers had to be Ananaikyō members. This alienated non-Ananaikyō staff, especially young people like Shimizu, who felt that she therefore did not fit in with OISCA's work environment. Moreover, she told me, her training center was old-fashioned, and women were relegated to a lower status, doing menial chores (*shita bataraki*) such as serving tea, not only for guests but also for the male staff, and the women staff never had the opportunity to teach agriculture. I saw this substantiated in the fact that whenever I visited a training center in Japan, I was always asked to help in the kitchen, and I had to explicitly request to participate in the agricultural classes. Shimizu commented that she joined this line of work—international aid work—because she wanted to get away from such anachronistic constraints (*shigarami*) of so-called

Japanese values, and she was dismayed to find that this was not the case in OISCA (personal communication, January 28, 2010). Thus, the shock that induced a sense of difference emerged within “cultures” as well.

As Takai and Koike indicated, intercultural and interpersonal interactions were not simply about creating “human relationships”; it pointed toward a much more fraught relationship in which participants had to calibrate their own understandings of difference and connectivity in forever ambivalent ways. If the dominant discourse among the senior Japanese staff was to frame these moments of culture shock as evidence of “Japaneseness,” my task in this dissertation is to show that these were also moments of ambivalence in which such unitary interpretations were destabilized for the various aid actors involved. The ambivalence of aspiring for proximity did not only mask structures of power—it also contained its own counter-effects.

## **My Fieldwork**

If aid work was defined by the messiness, ambivalence, and struggles in the aftershock effects of intimate relations in “the field,” this was a parallel experience to my own fieldwork. On my second visit to one of the training centers in Japan, one of the Japanese staff picked me up at the station, and on the drive over, told me how happy she was to have me there. It was the beginning of the year for a training course, and the training center was busy teaching trainees how to adjust to the daily routines and duties there. “It’s such a relief to have another Japanese person here this week who can teach the trainees how to clean.” Taken aback, I mumbled that I did not think I knew how to clean properly. She laughed and reassured me that, as a Japanese person, I would be able to teach them about cleanliness. I was confused. The next morning, she placed me with two female trainees and we were put in charge of cleaning the women’s

bathroom. She briefly showed us which cloths to use for what purpose, and the order in which we should clean things. As we picked up our dusters and pieces of cloth and started working, it was clear that the trainees and I were not different in our unease. The Japanese staff member had assumed that the ability and sensibility to clean a bathroom in a particular way would be a “given” (*atarimae*) in cultural terms, and that I would know. It was a shock for me to be told that this should be an ingrained, unmarked ability of “Japaneseness.” At the same time, while I knew that this was an arbitrary criterion, an essentialist view of culture, and an implicitly prejudiced view of the non-Japanese trainees, in my struggle to contend with this shock, I also wanted to live up to the staff’s expectations. Being Japanese had always been a porous and unreliable identity for me, but in this moment of shock, I found myself wanting to understand what the staff meant by “Japaneseness” and respond to it “properly.” I was both horrified and lured by the boundaries that she, as well as other Japanese staff over the months of my fieldwork, drew as cultural distinctions. I did not know what to do with it, but I could not disengage. My fieldwork was studded with such small moments of shock, in which I had to reassess myself, the other person, our relationship, and OISCA over and over again. I do not think that this is a unique fieldwork experience.

Between September 2009 and April 2011, I divided my time between OISCA’s Tokyo headquarters, three out of the four training centers in Japan, the Ananaikyō headquarters, the Gekkō observatory in Shizuoka, the OISCA vocational college also in Shizuoka, OISCA’s training center in Burma/Myanmar, and Yangon. I also visited other related institutions, such as ARI and a JOCV training center for Japanese volunteers. The Ananaikyō headquarters, observatory, and vocational college were not directly linked to OISCA’s projects, but they were institutions that were also established

by Yonosuke Nakano, and I wanted to understand the general constellation within which OISCA existed. In Burma/Myanmar, the Myanmar training center was in a zone that required foreigners to have special permits, and I had my permission through OISCA. This meant that I could do whatever I wanted inside the walls of the training center, but the local Burmese government monitored all of my activities outside of the property, even if I was on a trip with OISCA staff. This restricted the amount of research I could do outside of the training center, particularly because I knew that government officials regularly called the training center, and Burmese staff had to shoulder the burden of explaining and justifying my everyday activities.

In each location related to OISCA and with every person I met, I went through the same process of shock, reassessment, and negotiation, never to arrive at a final conclusion of what it was that I was experiencing. When I was finally able to realize that OISCA's aid actors themselves not only experienced similar struggles, but experienced them as a defining dynamic of aid work, I saw the reflections between fieldwork for me and fieldwork for them. Just as OISCA staff valued the messiness of the field and the entangled intimate relationships with others in intercultural encounters, I saw that the core of ethnography was also precisely that.

In many ways, therefore, the phenomena and experiences that OISCA staff presented to me were anticipated mirror images of my own work. A number of anthropologists have addressed the ways that our ethnographic objects use concepts that parallel anthropological ones, challenging us to reconfigure ours (Marcus and Holmes 2005; Maurer 2002; Riles 2000). Even more pressing is the claim by Miyazaki and Riles (2005) that describing the parallels between other experts' knowledge and our own is not enough, and that we must bring "the abeyance of agency that is at the heart of ethnography into the analytical and descriptive project, by understanding

anthropological analysis as an act of response... resetting and reorienting the terms of anthropological knowledge at its endpoint" (Miyazaki and Riles 2005: 328). I see OISCA as such a case that demands analysis as an act of response at anthropology's endpoint: if the ontological sensibility and basis of anthropological knowledge is ethnography, how can we respond to forms of professionalism that are based on similar principles of "fieldwork"? Supposing that the anthropologist and OISCA's aid worker are both two figures toiling in the messiness of intimate relations in "the field," we need to find ways to distinguish one from the other in order to establish a relationship in which to respond.

To my mind, the question here is not what anthropological analysis can do that is not already presaged by OISCA, but how we can maintain a critical distance so as to enable analysis as response. In contrast to "new ethnographic subjects," as in Miyazaki and Riles' call, I suggest that an analysis of aid work such as OISCA's requires the temporal disjuncture between the moment of ethnography and the moment of writing. As Miyazaki argues, temporal incongruity can be an engine of knowledge formation that is propelled by a prospective momentum (Miyazaki 2003; 2004). This is not an argument for the separation of "data" and "theory." Rather, what is needed in looking at OISCA is a certain distance from the immediacy of ethnographic work—even also a distance from its ethos of the abeyance of agency, which is also a modality that OISCA essentializes for itself—while drawing on other aspects of the moment of ethnography. What is at "the heart of ethnography" is multiple, and which aspects we draw from it will depend on our objects of study. In the case of OISCA, the abeyance and immediacy of the ethnographic register were inadequate. Because my intimate interactions with OISCA's aid actors and my disposition to suspend my own beliefs and disbeliefs mapped too well onto the modalities of aid work in OISCA, I found myself arriving at

the dominant conclusion in the organization—that it was all about mutuality and “Japaneseness.” I was taken by the sense of immediacy, belonging, and “truth” in the experience of ethnographic work, and rushed to try to make sense of it *as such*. And as such, I ended up where OISCA’s dominant voices wanted me to be. In fact, the moment of ethnography was also an elastic gauging of distances between objects of inquiry and myself, and analysis as response could not come about while I held onto only the moments of proximity and immediacy.

Thus, I misidentified what it was that I needed to respond to: culture shock. In other words, in my anxiety to try to sideline my own culture shock, I failed to see how a sense of disjuncture, unease, and ambivalence was also central to my ethnography and the aid work in OISCA. The technique of gauging distance, the elastic dynamic between gaps and connections, was already there in the ethnography in the form of aftershock effects. If the moment of ethnography can invite an abeyance of agency and create a sense of immediacy with the object of study, it also involves constant shudders of cultural shock in which we jump back to assess our relationship with it. In this project, responding in kind as a form of analysis, therefore, has meant picking out the sense of culture shock and the ambivalence of inhabiting the double-take in the fabric of the ethnographic moment, and pulling it into the moment of writing as if unraveling the end of a yarn to create a gap between then and now. It is only in staying with that distancing technique that an analytical engagement becomes possible with the forms of disjuncture and internal critique that were already unfolding in my fieldwork.

## **The Chapters**

Each of the chapters examines a particular modality of relation in OISCA, and the cultural politics of aspiring for certain forms of proximity.

Chapter one, “The Gaps of Global Culturalism,” addresses what is hidden from view in interactions and concepts that seem global. Working through the ethnographic moment of a meeting that OISCA staff and supporters had with a UN official in New York City, I show how a sense of globality was enacted through a relational opacity in this particular interaction. That is, misunderstandings and the lack of information, facilitated by my role as an English-Japanese interpreter, were “gaps” that were key to the construction of scale. In addition, I trace another form of gap, namely, the view of “Japan” and “the West” as oppositional categories without a middle ground. Thus, I suggest that “gaps” simultaneously generated scales of globality and reified categories, particularly cultural boundaries in the case of OISCA. This constitutes what I call “global culturalism” in OISCA. Lastly, I point to the existence of a third gap: that between the two gaps that I present. That is, I am able to present my analysis by delineating and shifting between the relational and conceptual gaps, and this is a tactic that I discreetly employ in the rest of the dissertation. Moreover, the global culturalism explained in this chapter serves as a foil for the other chapters—another gap.

Chapter two, “Crisis, Loss, Renewal—The Redemptive Dream of Aid,” examines how ideas of global and national crisis, and a sense of cultural and historical loss in Japan, motivated the vision of international aid work among OISCA’s senior Japanese staff and supporters as a way to “redo” development differently elsewhere. Focusing on the morning disciplinary exercises and the organization’s slogan of *furusato-zukuri* (“making a home-place”) as instances in which notions of Japanese pastness were invoked, I show the different ways that a sense of past loss was imagined to be redeemed through the training of non-Japanese cultural others from around the Asia-Pacific by revitalizing so-called “Japanese values.” The chapter thus shows how issues of historical memory and colonial legacies can impinge on the intercultural relations in

aid activities. In the end, I describe how the idea of *furusato-zukuri* was not rejected by Burmese staff, but reworked toward the future in other ways.

Chapter three, “Intimate Labor and Care (*Omoiyari*) as Aid Work,” examines how aid work in OISCA was constructed as a work of “care” (*omoiyari*) through the labor of making intimate relations. I begin with the fact that Japanese aid actors in Burma/Myanmar, including OISCA staff, saw that their work involved a calibration of cultural differences and similarities between the two countries. Against this backdrop, the labor of making intimate relations in OISCA appears meaningful. I show how the “intimate labor” by both Japanese and Burmese aid actors consisted of: (1) an emphasis on sweaty, muddy, smelly labor in agricultural work and life at the training centers; (2) a commitment to OISCA that blurred the distinctions between work and life; and (3) making references to “family-like” relations. At the same time, moments of non-labor appeared radically unacceptable, and in those instances, care through intimate labor clashed against other conceptualizations of care and family-ness among Burmese staff.

Chapter four, “Replication and Difference in ‘Making Persons’,” examines how the generalization of OISCA’s aid activities in an effort to have greater impact in the world was conceptualized through what I call “simulations” and “simulative practices.” Focusing in particular on the pedagogy of “leading-by-example” (*sossen suihan*) in the training programs, which upheld the value of learning by simulating the actions of the teacher, I look at the ways that the negotiation of replication and difference were central to OISCA’s activities. I trace three mechanisms of this: forms of abeyance of knowledge and agency, the focus on the person as the unit of intervention in OISCA’s understanding of *hitozukuri* aid work, and the presentation of Japan and OISCA as “the model” of development for other countries. A comparison with the views of Burmese



staff and Japanese aid workers from other organizations highlight what was at stake in positing models and demands of simulation in agricultural development work.

Chapter five, “Aid Work as Debt and Gratitude—*Kye:zu:*, *On-gaeshi*, and Loans,” takes up the moral and monetary debts among Burmese staff and alumni at the Myanmar training center to analyze how Burmese and Japanese staff understood aid work as an aspirational endeavor by conceptualizing debt-relations and the obligation to return the debt as ethical in different ways. Comparing the idea of moral debt among Burmese actors in the notion of *kye:zu:* and among Japanese staff in the concept of *on-gaeshi*, as well as the loan schemes for staff and alumni at the Myanmar training center, I examine the different ways that moral and monetary debts, and their repayment, constituted understandings of aid work for Burmese and Japanese staff. In short, aid work was defined through forms of indebtedness and their obligations of return, which wavered between oppressive and transformative potentials.

Each of the chapters examines the work, in all its unevenness, that went into establishing proximate relations within the confines of OISCA. An underlying dynamic in all these practices are the culturalist notions of difference and the humanistic yearning for proximity that played off of each other to create an understanding of aid work as an endeavor that transcends boundaries and promotes universal human relations. As chapter two demonstrates, the value of this work was based on an understanding of a world and society in crisis. The disasters of March 2011 in Japan has created a new atmosphere of crisis in the country, if not worldwide, and I see the subsequent calls for “human bonds” (*kizuna*) and intimate relations as a logic that resembles OISCA’s modality of aid work. Again, as chapter two suggests, this pairing of a sense of crisis with yearnings for intimate relations connotes redemptive dreams—dreams that might liberate us, but could also bring about new forms of imperialist and

nationalist motivations. What is needed is an attention to the aftershock effects and ambivalences that can challenge logics of global culturalism. I will return to this specter of the future in the conclusion.

## CHAPTER 1: The Gaps Of Global Culturalism

### Introduction

On August 2, 2011, the OISCA USA Chapter was established in Raritan, New Jersey, making it OISCA-International's 29th chapter worldwide.<sup>15</sup> The first activity by the USA chapter took place on April 10, 2012. A delegation of seventeen Japanese OISCA supporters and three Japanese staff from Tokyo headquarters flew from Japan to New York City in order to attend the planting of cherry trees (*sakura*) at an elementary school in Raritan as part of OISCA's worldwide Children's Forest Program (CFP). The staff knew that I was back in graduate school in New York State, and asked me to help the group by serving as the English-Japanese interpreter at the meetings and ceremonies, given that none of the members of the delegation spoke English. The staff also did not speak much English, if at all. In addition, they wanted me to assist them in taking care of the supporters who were all elderly—ranging from about sixty-five to eight-five years old—especially on the second day, which was allotted entirely to sightseeing. Having concluded fieldwork in June 2011, this was in fact a great opportunity for me to reconnect with some of the staff, and to follow-up on the

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<sup>15</sup> As I explain in chapter two, OISCA is composed of OISCA the NGO, which conducts training activities and environmental projects, and OISCA-International, which is a coalition of loosely connected "chapters" around the world. The chapters do sometimes conduct activities that involve OISCA-the-NGO, Tokyo staff, or members of other chapters around the world, but in general they form a loose consortium of like-minded people who share ideas and report informally on their activities through a listserv managed by a Japanese staff in Tokyo. The 29 chapter are in the following countries: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cambodia, China, Ethiopia, Fiji, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Palau, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Timor-Leste, Thailand, Uruguay, and United States of America. In 2012, a 30th chapter was created in the United Arab Emirates.

previous year's developments in OISCA. I could not help but appreciate the fact that "the field" was coming to me.

Although I had also helped OISCA and its delegation back in August 2011 when the USA chapter was established, on this second trip I was struck even more by OISCA's apparent bond with prominent figures in global circuits. We met with members of the Japanese foreign service, UN officials, and other international actors, and from what the OISCA supporters told me, they had met with other high-ranking Japanese state officials in Washington D.C. before coming to New York. At the same time, as I watched the members of the delegation hesitate in new environments, and as I interpreted the high-level meetings, ceremonies, and conversations between people who did not speak the same language, I wondered how any organization or person becomes a global actor.

One of the OISCA staff with the delegation, Nakamura, was one of the most senior staff members who had been in charge of high-level relations for OISCA and Yonosuke Nakano since the 1950s. He was in his seventies, but sometimes I forgot his age because his compact and sturdy physique and agile movements belied his years. When I reached the UN building, he was already there, and together we waited for the rest of the delegation to arrive from the airport. He assured me that he had already gone to the conference room to check that it was ready, and that he had included my name on the list of visitors at the reception so that I would be allowed through security. Once the delegation members arrived, Nakamura and I led them through the revolving doors into the reception area, where each person handed their passports to the security guard. Seeing these elderly Japanese men and women fumble with their bags and possessions, hesitate in front of the metal detectors, one would have never guessed that most of them were presidents of their own companies, board members of corporations,

and city council members. Although it is an obvious point, I was surprised to realize that one's socio-economic and political position in Japan did not translate into a cosmopolitan ease in an environment such as the UN. They were all, except one, OISCA members, membership being one of the most important ways that OISCA had been supported financially, politically, and organizationally. In return for the yearly fees and moral support, members had the opportunity to participate in trips overseas, to visit project sites or to take part in a high-level delegation such as this one.

Nakamura led us up the elevator to the conference room that he had scouted earlier. The room fit our twenty-person group just right. There were windows on one side facing other buildings, and on the opposite wall hung a world map. One of the delegation members asked if she would be able to buy such a map at the UN gift shop. She commented that she had never seen a map quite like it in Japan, and that it would make a nice souvenir. Nakamura instructed me to sit in the chair next to the head of the table where the UN official was going to sit. Everybody chatted about the plans for the rest of the day, what they might buy at the gift shop.

A few minutes later, the UN official walked in, and we all stood up to greet him. A tall European man in his late fifties, it only took him a few strides to cross the room and sit in the chair next to me. Nakamura introduced me as the interpreter for the meeting, and I laughed to correct him that I was not an official interpreter but would do my best. Everybody sat down.

Matsumoto, the head of the delegation, president of the OISCA Aichi branch, and former mayor of Anjō city in Aichi prefecture, spoke first. He talked about the cherry trees that were donated to D.C. from the city of Tokyo a hundred years ago, how the first batch died of diseases but that the second batch had survived beautifully. He explained that the OISCA delegation had first gone to D.C. to commemorate the

centennial anniversary of this gifting. He was honored to represent OISCA on this trip, and to start the OISCA USA activities by planting cherry trees in an elementary school in New Jersey. I interpreted the speech, sentence by sentence. At the point when the UN official heard the words “sakura” and “Washington D.C.,” however, he laughed and told me that he understood that. Matsumoto smiled and nodded. Both the delegate and the UN official seemed to agree that the cross-continental and cross-historical relationship did not need interpreting, so I held back.

But did they really understand each other at this moment? It occurred to me that what this affirmation of a relationship eclipsed were the complex layers of other relations upon which this moment was based. Matsumoto, for example, did not explain his personal connections to the cherry tree gifting that happened a hundred years ago. According to the National Parks Service (NPS), fortuitous encounters and the work of committed Americans led to the donation of two thousand cherry trees from the city of Tokyo to Washington D.C. in 1910 (NPS N.d.). However, when the trees arrived on January 6, 1910, inspectors found that they were all diseased, and the trees had to be burned. The mayor of Tokyo and the first lady at the time, Helen H. Taft, agreed that another donation should be made, and the Tokyo mayor approached Yasozō Kumagai, the agriculturist in charge of government projects to improve and disseminate plant species around Japan. Kumagai subsequently succeeded in producing three thousand cherry trees that survived the trans-Pacific journey, and the trees were planted on D.C. soil. This initial gifting spawned several other exchanges between the U.S. and Japan (National Cherry Blossom Festival N.d.).

Before joining government projects, Kumagai had been the vice-principal of the Aichi Prefectural Agricultural and Forestry vocational college (currently a high school), one of the three major agricultural colleges in prewar Japan. What was fortuitous was that Matsumoto was an alumnus of this agricultural college, and as much as he was in the U.S. representing OISCA, he was also there to represent his alma mater. In fact, two other participants in the delegation were also OISCA members from Anjō city and alumni of the college. A strong bond of *senpai-kōhai* (senior-junior) relations tied together Kumagai, Matsumoto, and the other two members across a century, and across countries through their involvement with OISCA.<sup>16</sup>

The implicit acknowledgement of a transnational relationship thus had the effect of obscuring the various relations that flowed beneath this encounter between Matsumoto and the UN official. Responding to this moment by not interpreting the specific part of the conversation, I realized that I had added to the opacity of this relation. In fact, I argue that the effect of this relationship remaining opaque was that the conversing participants—the delegation and the UN official—could feel their interaction as an expression of globality. In other words, not exactly knowing the other helped create the impression that they were in a global situation.

In this chapter, I consider the question of how staff and supporters constructed OISCA as a global actor by focusing on the effects of certain relational and conceptual “gaps.” This chapter might be considered to be the “contextual” chapter, but by showing the information in a particular manner, I point to the ways that the different forms of presenting and concealing the relations, history, and social milieu of OISCA

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<sup>16</sup> *Senpai-kōhai* relations have been studied in the context of workplaces and schools in Japan, and scholars argue that this relation has the function of ensuring adherence to institutional roles and collective bonds (Cave 2004; Hersh and Peak 1998). Here I am not so much interested in this functionality, but rather in the long and wide extent of these relations that undergird OISCA’s international activities.

had certain effects. In other words, there was no all-encompassing “context” in the sense of a social canvas within which OISCA could be understood (Dilley 1999; Strathern 2004[1991])—what would be considered the contextual background were in fact operational elements in the construction of globality in OISCA. In particular, I point to three ways in which gaps in OISCA served to generate a sense of globality, as well as a construction of culturalist categories, in what I call global culturalism. The first observation is the gaps that I detected between the UN official and the OISCA delegation during the meeting, that is, a paucity of information and misunderstanding that secured a kind of opacity in relations. I suggest that layers of complexity—various relations, clashing interests, mistranslations—were smoothed over by all parties involved who agreed on certain abstract terms. The effect of this was to maintain themselves opaque to each other, differences muted for the sake of a “global relationship,” which ironically appeared transparent in the directness of the physical interaction. Although not exhaustive by any means, I take up the terms “relations” and “international NGO” as words that sealed the opacity in this interaction, serving as proxies that eclipsed the complex history and contingent relations underlying this exchange.

Second, I examine the conceptual gaps that run through much of OISCA’s official discourses about international aid work. In short, I suggest that many of the senior Japanese staff members posited opposing categories such as “Japan” and “the West,” as if there were no ambiguous categories in between. I call these conceptual gaps “the missing middle.” In this formulation, the middle-space between “Japan” and “the West”—that is, intercultural mixtures—disappeared from view as OISCA stood in as a proxy for the gap. The construction of this “missing middle” gave off the sense of an unmoored presence, a sense of globality, which enabled the “international NGO,” that



is, OISCA, to emerge as a surrogate that fills in the space between the contrasted categories. In this sense, OISCA was imagined as the custodian of both globality and culturalism—hence, global culturalism.

The third kind of gap will be touched on briefly at the end, and it refers to the gaps on which my analyses depend, including the gap that I am writing into the distinction between the first and second kinds of gaps. These three forms of gaps will be presented in interweaving form rather than sequentially to show how they were interconnected, one construction of gaps happening inside the other and vice versa.

The way that I understand the effects of gaps in OISCA is, in a way, as projects of scale-making. As Anna Tsing stated, “scale is not just a neutral form for viewing the world; scale must be brought into being... claimed and contested in cultural and political projects (Tsing 2005: 58). Thus, the global as well as the local—even the national and perhaps even the personal—are interrelated effects of particularly situated, contingent practices that social actors activate in different ways (see also Cox 1998; Delaney and Leitner 1997; Kurtz 2003; Mansfield 2005). In particular, in *The Network Inside Out*, Annelise Riles (2000) demonstrates the effects of gaps in generating scale in bureaucratic practices. She argues that scales of globality are effects of what she calls “a figure seen twice,” that is, two-dimensional aesthetic forms that give the illusion of dimension and depth, echoes of patterns whose efficacy in generating scale relies on their intermittent invisibility. What is notable here is how the gaps in the aesthetic forms, such as in documents and diagrams, “engendered a desire for the figure’s completion, and it was this apprehension of the figure’s internal lack that generated the desire to fill in the gaps that in turn brought the Network diagram to the foreground” (Riles 2000: 183). In other words, the gaps in the form were operative elements that simultaneously created an impulsion to “fill the gap” and foregrounded the form itself

as the locus of knowledge production. At the same time, however, an important effect was the difficulty to see these operations of gaps, as the forms “cleverly exploit our collective expectations that matters of rational agreement are not matters of form and vice versa and in so doing shade the forms that supersede and displace agreement itself” (Riles 2000: 182). Thus, as soon as aesthetic form was brought to the fore in bureaucratic practices, it almost immediately receded from view, leaving the illusion of scale, of the global as an effect of these forms appearing and disappearing as “the same thing” (Riles 2000: 1; see also Munn 1973: 171). In sum, the relevance of Riles’ study to the analysis of OISCA in this chapter is how gaps—in social relations, conceptual categories, and academic analysis—highlighted forms at the same time that they were quickly taken for granted and disappeared from critical engagement in the generation of scale.

In this vein, it is useful to turn to another monograph published in the same year, *The Book of Jerry Falwell* by Susan Harding (2000), which also focuses on the efficacy of “gaps” in a completely different domain. Harding emphasizes the aesthetic form of the narratives of evangelical preachers, what she calls “the art of Jerry Falwell,” to show how the apprehension of the gaps and the salience of linguistic forms generated scale, if you will, in the faithful followers’ communion with a universal God. In a different version of Riles’ formulation, Harding explains that the narrative gaps and the desire to fill them brought Falwell and his followers into a relationship, as Falwell “produces the gaps, the anomalies, the excesses, the apertures for the uncanny, and his people produce faith by harmonizing his discrepancies” (Harding 2000: 90). In short, the gaps and the propensity to fill them brought the aesthetic form of the narratives into focus, serving as a vehicle through which evangelicals could “scale up” to a spiritually higher domain. At the same time, Harding points out that the gaps explicitly generated

“wobbly” rather than authoritative narratives, from which “Jerry Falwell continuously emerges as a complex, mercurial, irreducible ambiguous man of God,” impervious to critique (Harding 2000: 88). As in the liberal rationalism of Riles’ ethnographic subjects, here we see how gaps in illiberal movements also served to obfuscate critical engagement. But if gaps in the aesthetic form of UN documents achieved consensus through the backdoor, the gaps in Falwell’s narrative formulations accomplished conversions and commitments through a more explicit provocation of linguistic form.

At the same time, while Riles and Harding demonstrate the ways that gaps in the form generate scales of globality and universality, I suggest that another effect of gaps in OISCA was the crystallization of conceptual categories. Thus, it was not only the form that generated gaps; the gaps also constituted the form. Stated differently, as in film negatives, the boundaries that surfaced out of the shadows of gaps were what give shape to the contours of the forms.

It is in this sense that I purposefully use the term “interpreting” rather than “translation” to describe the interaction between the UN official and the OISCA delegates, as well as my own participation as the interpreter. As translation and interpreting professionals state, the two are similar but not the same, as the former deals with text and the latter with oral exchanges (NCIHC N.d.). The difference is not only one of medium, but also about the consequent distinctions in the temporality, background knowledge, and levels of perspective between the two practices (Vianna 2005). Furthermore, the term “interpreting” allows me to make a connection to issues of interpretation and incommensurability as argued by Thomas S. Kuhn, which raises the question of categorical distinctions produced through the efficacy of gaps.

Kuhn (1982) argued that translation and interpretation are different enterprises in that “the fact of translation has not... changed the meanings of words and phrases,”

whereas interpretation cannot move between one language and another without distorting the words at play (Kuhn 1982: 672). This is what Kuhn means in the idea of incommensurability, that is, “the claim that there is no language, neutral or otherwise, into which both theories, conceived as sets of sentences, can be translated without residue or loss” (Kuhn 2000: 36). I suggest that interpreting, similar to interpretation here, foregrounds such assumptions of incommensurability, as it tends to accentuate the gaps in the shift from one language to another. That is, if translation and articulation are seen to enable “contingent unification across difference,” what I observed in OISCA was different in that it was *disarticulation* rather than articulation that played the more important role (Choy 2005: 11; see also Hall and Grossberg 1996; Laclau and Mouffe 1985).<sup>17</sup> In short, theories of translation and articulation are mainly concerned with effects of connectivity and continuity, whereas my interest lies in looking at the relational and conceptual gaps that foregrounded the disparateness between categories, and the consequent effect of globality. Thus, the misunderstandings and lack of information were crucial in the interaction between the UN official and the OISCA delegates. As Ellen Elias-Bursac (2012) demonstrated in her study of translation and interpreting at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (the ICTY), unlike translations in which terminologies were relatively fixed, interpreting demanded participants to adjust terms depending on the situation and issues at hand.<sup>18</sup> As such, the different interpretations of terms in real-time exchanges changed the understandings of particular events, foregrounding the

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<sup>17</sup> Choy does acknowledge the importance of difference in articulation: “If the articulation of knowledges is indeed accomplished through translation, it might follow that articulation’s power derives not from the unified voice it affords but from its constant implication of constituent difference” (Choy 2005: 12). Nevertheless, his overarching emphasis is on the effects of connectivity in translation and articulation, and as such, differs from my own.

<sup>18</sup> But for an ethnographic analysis of the ways that translations also involve negotiations of unstable terms, see Rosga 2005.

gaps as well as the distinctions between perspectives, the evaluations of which came to play a central role in the adjudication of war crimes in Elias-Bursac's study.

In this sense, what I find useful in the theory of interpretation and incommensurability is the suggestion that gaps construct certain categories, just as the elimination of certain information brings to light either the major roads or the topographical terrain on an atlas. The point is that these visions and categories are maintained as disparate from each other. But what Kuhn does not elaborate is how incommensurability is constructed or what its effects might be in the production of the paradigms, categories, or concepts; he seems to take it as a given consequence of the progression of scientific revolutions. In contrast, what strikes me in OISCA is that gaps were generated in particular ways to gloss over specific things, and that gaps themselves were what constructed the perceptions of concepts, not the other way around as Kuhn suggests.<sup>19</sup> Thomas Yarrow's (2008b) analysis of the effects of incommensurability posited between "indigenous knowledge" and "Western knowledge" by aid actors is particularly salient here. In contrast to scholarship on development aid that criticizes the dichotomization of "indigenous" and "Western" categories, Yarrow argues for "appreciating the socially and discursively complex ways in which actors employ these very distinctions" (Yarrow 2008b: 238). Thus, he illustrates how development workers, village chiefs, and aid beneficiaries in Ghana used such dualisms in negotiating their identities and relations to each other.

If we go back to the theory of incommensurability in light of Yarrow's analysis, it seems that even Kuhn might not have been oblivious to the link that exists between the

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<sup>19</sup> See Sakai 1991 for a historical and philosophical analysis of the ways that translations constructed language unities. The implication there, I suggest, is that translations created the gaps that enabled the generation of categories units. I propose that interpreting, more than textual translations, have more pronounced effects of making gaps.

idea of incommensurability and the construction of culturalist categories. Struan Jacobs (2003) argues that Michael Polanyi in *Personal Knowledge* (1958) actually developed the idea of the “logical gap” in scientific controversies, presaging Kuhn. Moreover, Jacobs argues that Polanyi was influenced by Evans-Pritchard’s *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937) and the *Confessions* of St. Augustine in developing his theory of the “logical gap.” Taking just Evans-Pritchard’s influence in Jacobs’ analysis, it becomes evident that the theory of incommensurability can be generative of beliefs in culturalist boundaries, as Polanyi agreed with Evans-Pritchard that Azande magic and the worldviews of science were mutually exclusive. Interestingly, Michael Lambek (1993) also draws on Evans-Pritchard’s study of Azande witchcraft and magic in his discussion on incommensurability between spirit possession, cosmology, and Islam, although he does not reference the classic text for its suggestions of incommensurability (see also Handler 2009). Although these studies tend to lean more towards the perspective that the categories came first and then the gaps, what I want to emphasize is that the gaps also have the effect of bringing categories and their distinctions solidly into view. The impossibility of interpretation between things can itself crystallize those very things.

It is in this emphasis on gaps and the consequent construction of categories that I define what I call global culturalism in OISCA. On one level is the effect of gaps in relations and concepts that allow for double-visions that generate a sense of the global. As I examine further in chapter four, the replications make it seem as if what we are seeing is a manifestation of generalization and globality. On another level is the ways that gaps also crystallize categories, including subjects and cultural boundaries, the disarticulation between things creating a sense of solidity about those things. To presage my final point in this chapter, this global culturalism is the foil to the rest of the

dissertation, which demonstrates how intercultural relations were actually messy negotiations of cultural difference and proximity.

### **The Proxy of “Relations”**

While Matsumoto and the UN official seemed to agree on the solid reality of their relationship at the moment of their interaction, the appearance of this relation obscured the other relations that had led up to this encounter. For example, the UN official did not know that in Matsumoto’s city there was the Anjō City Council Members League for OISCA, and another league of politicians supporting OISCA at the prefectural level, both of which held various activities and events where Matsumoto could meet prominent members of the community and nurture those relationships in the name of OISCA.<sup>20</sup> The UN official might also have been surprised to hear that there were Leagues to Promote OISCA’s International Activities in other prefectures, as well as at the level of the national Diet, composed of politicians from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). As of 2011, there were over fifty members in the National Diet League to Promote OISCA’s International Activities (“OISCA Diet League”) from both the House of Councilors and the House of Representatives, with LDP representative from Kobe, Kōichi Tani, as its president. His father Yōichi Tani, also an LDP representative, had been the president of the OISCA Diet League from 1999 to 2003. In early March 2012, Kōichi Tani gave a talk at the OISCA Aichi branch where, as the reader will recall, Matsumoto is president.<sup>21</sup> It is not difficult to imagine that being an OISCA member provided fecund opportunities to connect with other, often influential, politicians.

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<sup>20</sup> OISCA Chubu training center and Aichi branch website, <http://oiscactc.cool.ne.jp/profile201001.shtml>, accessed on April 25, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Kōichi Tani’s blog, <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/tani1109/20120302>, accessed on April 25, 2012.

On several occasions, younger OISCA staff—those in their twenties and thirties who did not belong to Ananaikyō—expressed to me their bafflement in seeing OISCA’s political clout in various contexts. I was also always surprised and puzzled to see in the OISCA magazine names of famous political and public figures. In one of the most recent examples, among the dignitaries in attendance at OISCA’s 50th anniversary celebration held on October 7, 2011 were Japan’s emperor and empress, and former prime minister Yoshihiko Noda.<sup>22</sup>

At first I wondered if such relationships with prominent figures were a characteristic of older NGOs in Japan, and the key to their success. Pursuing this line of thought, I approached the Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP), another NGO established in the 1960s (in 1968). One day in April 2010, I made my way to the JOICFP headquarters in Tokyo to interview one of the senior staff members whom I call Takahashi. Takahashi, a lively man, began our conversation by characterizing OISCA and JOICFP as organizations that work based on a “pioneer spirit” with clearly defined purposes. He named three people as the pioneers of JOICFP: Shizue Katō, Chōjiro Kuni’i, and Nobusuke Kishi. He explained that Katō was the “spiritual pioneer” (*seishin teki na pioneer*). Katō was born in 1897 to wealthy industrialist parents, and became a baroness upon marrying her first husband. She traveled to the United States with her husband where she met Margaret Higgins Sanger, the reproductive rights activist who first coined the term “birth control.” After she returned to Japan in 1922, Katō began her own reproductive rights movement. Subsequently, Katō divorced her first husband, and married the labor activist Kanju

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<sup>22</sup> “Emperor and empress attend OISCA’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations,” Kyodo News, [http://www.kyodo.co.jp/photo-news/2011-10-08\\_28136/](http://www.kyodo.co.jp/photo-news/2011-10-08_28136/), accessed on April 25, 2012; Prime Minister’s Diary, <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/noda/yotei/rireki/201110.html>, accessed on April 25, 2012.



Katō, who helped establish the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ) in 1945. The two of them were elected as SDPJ representatives in the first postwar election for the House of Representatives in 1946. In 1954, Katō established the Family Planning Federation of Japan (FPFJ) under the umbrella of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), where Kuni'i served as the Secretary General.

Takahashi explained that in the process of working at IPPF, Kuni'i realized that the conditions for women and reproductive rights in other countries were even worse than in Japan. Takahashi pointed out that during this time in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Japanese government was beginning to embark on international aid activities. Kuni'i's concerns fit with this development. Around this time, Katō and Kuni'i decided to invite to Japan General William Draper, an advisor at IPPF and the former head of a business delegation from the U.S. that advised business conglomerates in postwar Japan. They took General Draper to meet various prominent political and business leaders, one of whom was Nobusuke Kishi, prime minister at the time, who subsequently offered support to their work. Katō, Kunii, and Kishi established JOICFP soon after General Draper's visit.

Despite the shared "pioneer spirit" of the founders that led OISCA and JOICFP, I was struck more by the differences between the two organizations in this narrative. First, JOICFP's history indicates that the inspiration and engine for its movement derived from Katō's experiences in the West and IPPF. Second, JOICFP began out of a political vision of Japan based on an emergent concern over international aid. Third, JOICFP's founders were elites in Japanese society—a baroness, a prominent doctor, and a prime minister. In contrast, although later in history OISCA acquired influential support, its beginnings took place outside the metropolis and international circles. Unlike JOICFP, the politicians' courting of OISCA, and vice versa, hinted at efforts by

conservative political actors to contend with non-industrial-elite citizens, such as farmers and members of new religions. Nakano's followers and OISCA's first staff were mostly from poor, rural, and uneducated backgrounds.

The UN official thanked Matsumoto for his introductory speech and for the delegation being there. "I know that trees are very important for the Japanese people, for environmental reasons but also for religious reasons," he said. I interpreted the word "religion" as *seishin*, meaning "spiritual." He gave words of encouragement, especially for the environmental projects that OISCA was conducting in Miyagi prefecture after the disasters of 2011. He expressed respect for the long-term project there, working with local people to plant pine trees along the coastline.

The UN official did not seem to know that the importance of "the spiritual" was not simply philosophical for OISCA, but also political in the very tangible terms of religious institutions and their relationships with conservative figures in Japan's postwar history. According to a senior staff member who had been with Ananaikyō and OISCA since its inception, Yonosuke Nakano made many of his initial practical decisions, such as moving the headquarters of his activities from Shizuoka to Tokyo, based on advice that he received from Jūjiro Furuta, then Chairman of Nihon University (personal communication, April 15, 2010). Furuta was a savvy man, and supporting Nakano, and by extension OISCA, fit into his political ambitions. It is evident that the relationships that emanated from Furuta's connection to Nakano formed the foundation

of OISCA's success from the 1960s onwards, relations that remained invisible in Matsumoto's encounter with the UN official.

Born in 1901, Furuta attended Nihon University and became an instructor there, and by 1958 he had reached the rank of Chairman. He was responsible for the massive expansion of the university, and he was ruthless. He prohibited all political activities by students, and did not allow the students' association to join the All-Japan Federation of Students' Self-Governing Associations. This stance, in addition to a state investigation of suspicious financial activities at the school, led to a massive student uprising in 1968. He died in 1970 (Nichigai Associates 2004; Ueda et al. 2001).

During his years at Nihon University, Furuta built strong relationships with prominent politicians, one of whom was Eisaku Satō, prime minister from 1964 to 1972. Together they founded Nippon-kai in 1962 to spearhead a movement aimed to foster world peace through an emphasis on Japanese cultural values which, the website asserts, naturally tend towards harmony.<sup>23</sup> Satō mentions Furuta several times in his diary, and it seems that Furuta attended, not only Nippon-kai meetings with Satō, but also informal and formal discussions surrounding elections. A senior OISCA staffer explained to me that Satō took the lead in founding the OISCA Diet League in 1967, recruiting several of his LDP colleagues, and in facilitating OISCA's registration as an incorporated foundation (personal communication, February 17, 2010).

How did Yonosuke Nakano meet Furuta in the first place? According to a senior staff member, a man by the name of Baiyū Watanabe was the connection. Watanabe, born in 1893, was a Buddhist monk of the Sōtō sect. After serving as a civil military official in Southeast Asia during the war, he taught at Nihon University—hence explaining his acquaintance with Furuta—and later became the president of Tsurumi

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<sup>23</sup> Nippon-kai, <http://www.nipponkai.or.jp/index.html>, accessed on April 27, 2012.

University (Ueda et al. 2001). He also worked at the Religious Affairs section of the Ministry of Education under the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the U.S. Occupation (Ōishi 1993).<sup>24</sup> It is not difficult to imagine how Baiyū, through his religious connections, might have met Yonosuke Nakano. An article in OISCA's magazine from August 1968 that announces the opening of the Astronomy and Geology Technical School (*Tenmon chigaku senmon gakkō*), the precursor to the OISCA high school and vocational college, brought these various actors together. The article carries congratulatory messages including those from Furuta and Baiyū, who express excitement that the school will educate youth spiritually as well as intellectually in "the great workings of the universe" in which we may "find true humanity" (OISCA 1968a).

Why would Baiyū introduce Nakano to Furuta, however? Browsing through Satō's diary, it becomes evident that the political environment of the 1960s embraced alliances between politicians, religious leaders, corporate executives, and other influential figures. Of particular interest, these records suggest that Satō and his entourage saw a need to befriend leaders of new religions. Starting in 1964 and 1965, for example, Satō began to approach Nikkyō Niwano from Risshō Kōseikai and Daisaku Ikeda from Sōka Gakkai to seek their support in various electoral campaigns (Satō 1998a; 1998b).<sup>25</sup>

Conversely, religious organizations had seized on the sudden freedom afforded to them under GHQ. Some organizations refused to participate in political activities

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<sup>24</sup> GHQ, or the General Headquarters, referred to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), General Douglas MacArthur, and his offices of the U.S. Occupation that lasted from 1945 to 1952.

<sup>25</sup> Religious scholar Susumu Shimazono defines "new religions" (*shinshūkyō*) as those that were established between the early 19th century to the early 1950s. Risshō Kōseikai and Sōka Gakkai fall into this category, as would Ananaikyō. He calls religious groups that were established or rose to prominence after the 1970s and 1980s "new new religions" (*shin-shinshūkyō*) (Shimazono 1992).

and others were shut down by GHQ, but the general atmosphere among religious leaders, especially those of new religions, was enthusiasm at the prospect of participating in political and social movements. The most prominent new religions leading this trend was Sōka Gakkai. In 1955 Sōka Gakkai entered city-level politics, and in 1964, it formed its political party Kōmeitō. In 1965, the coalition of new religions, Shinshūren, also entered politics. Thus, religious political parties were becoming a force, and politicians in power were keen to bring these actors into their fold in order to help strengthen the foundation of the conservative faction (T. Nakano 2003: 150-51). Furuta played a valuable role in this regard, using the Nippon-kai as a way to mobilize the financial world, universities, Kōmeitō, and religious organizations in order to bring them together behind the Satō administration (T. Nakano 2003: 152). Baiyū's assessment of the benefits for OISCA in introducing Nakano to Furuta was well-founded, and it is substantiated in Furuta's subsequent introduction of Nakano to Satō and other prominent political figures.

Even after Nakano passed away in 1974, these relations stemming from shared interests among politicians, bureaucrats, and religious leaders helped expand OISCA's influence. One Japanese staff member in his mid-seventies recounted to me how, in the early 1980s, several of the staff members relentlessly visited Hiroshi Tanimura, a former Vice Minister of the Ministry of Finance and board member of the Tokyo Stock Exchange, to ask him to become the president of OISCA's board of directors. After repeated attempts for a year to speak with him and convince him through other political connections, Tanimura finally agreed, after hearing from various sources that OISCA was well connected and respected among influential politicians. Tanimura's backing proved to be crucial in securing support from various business federations and companies around Japan (personal communication, January 13, 2010). As another

staffer in the Tokyo office confirmed, Tanimura facilitated meetings between OISCA staff members and powerful personages in various regions, enabling OISCA to expand its network among prominent members around the country (personal communication, June 2, 2010).

At the UN meeting, these layers of relationships throughout Japan's postwar history were hidden from view. I suggest that this had the effect of bringing OISCA members and the UN official on the same perspectival plane. I would venture to say that if the UN official had heard about these relations underlying Matsumoto's presence in that place at that time, he would have had to contend with historical specificities and contextual differences that would disrupt the "global" connection he was happy to forge. I am sure that neither did it occur to Matsumoto to point this out. Furthermore, although I had some knowledge about OISCA's background, there were many things that I did not know either, and I was definitely in the dark about the UN official's history. And many of the people present also had no idea what had brought me there. Yet, it was due to this missing information between us that created the sense of sharing a global encounter. It struck me that there was no room for knowing relations in a space of "global" scale; these spaces of ignorance, this gap, was in fact what created the effect of globality.

### **The Proxy of "International NGO"**

Nodding at my interpretation of the UN official's perspective on the spiritual value of trees in Japan, Matsumoto proceeded to give a brief overview of OISCA for the UN official. He explained that it started in 1961, and had been recognized as an

international NGO with Category I consultative status with the UN.<sup>26</sup> He told the official that OISCA had been working hard toward the two goals of environmental conservation and development around the world through human resource development (*jinzai ikusei*). He mentioned OISCA's Children's Forest Program (CFP), and that so far it had conducted projects in 26 countries, at 4,410 schools, covering 3,900 hectares, and planting over 6,300,000 trees with children from these countries and schools.<sup>27</sup> He repeated that the OISCA USA chapter was established in 2011, and this trip was to begin its first activity at a school in New Jersey. He stressed the importance of spreading environmental conservation activities worldwide, and the value of imparting this mission to children around the world.

When I finished interpreting this speech, it was the UN official's turn to reciprocate. He thanked Matsumoto for the information, and offered words of encouragement and support for OISCA's environmental activities worldwide. He commented that 26 countries and more than six million trees planted around the world was a very large forest indeed, and expressed his wishes to work with OISCA in the future. He explained that in order to shift the economy towards a green economy, for

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<sup>26</sup> In 1975, OISCA gained roster consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and elevated to general status in 1995. Article 71 of the United Nations Charter stipulates ECOSOC's consultations with nongovernmental organizations, and ECOSOC resolution 1996/31 governs relationships with NGOs today. By having consultative status with ECOSOC, NGOs can attend international conferences, make statements at these events, participate in discussions, organize side events, enter UN premises, and lobby. The levels of consultative status are the following: "General consultative status is reserved for large international NGOs whose area of work covers most of the issues on the agenda of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies. These tend to be fairly large, established international NGOs with a broad geographical reach. Special consultative status is granted to NGOs which have a special competence in, and are concerned specifically with, only a few of the fields of activity covered by the ECOSOC. These NGOs tend to be smaller and more recently established. Organizations that apply for consultative status but do not fit in any of the other categories are usually included in the Roster. These NGOs tend to have a rather narrow and/or technical focus" (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs NGO Branch, "Introduction to ECOSOC Consultative Status," <http://csonet.org/index.php?menu=30>, accessed May 2, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Later a young staff corrected him. These statistics were from the previous fiscal year—the website had not been updated—and the numbers were slightly higher at this point.

example, the UN would have to rely on partners other than governments, such as international NGOs. In this sense, he told his audience, OISCA was one of the best examples of an international NGO with which he would be interested in cooperating more closely.

At first glance, OISCA does indeed seem to be an exemplar of an “international NGO” in Japan. The impression from particular articles in the OISCA magazine is indeed in this light. As early as 1968, there were pieces in the magazine about the value of OISCA’s agricultural development activities in the Asia-Pacific, connecting it to Japan’s global “mission of peace” (Watanabe 1968a, 1968b). Beginning in the 1970s, the magazine was filled with pieces about the importance of OISCA’s activities as an international NGO, and staff members reported on their participation in international conferences on aid and NGOs. In 1986 and 1987, OISCA also held World NGO Symposiums, inviting NGO representatives and government officials from around the world, as well as officials of international agencies such as the World Bank (Watanabe 1986, 1987). In an article in the OISCA magazine from 1986, Yasuhiko Yoshida, the director of the NGO Liaison Office of the UN Headquarters in Geneva at the time, writes that out of the 750 NGOs in the world with consultative status with the UN, only five were Japanese NGOs. He praises OISCA for being one of the few Japanese organizations with the highest Category I status with ECOSOC, and for its successful human resource training programs in the Asia-Pacific region (Yoshida 1986).

Records of Diet proceedings show that, in the 1970s, politicians and bureaucrats were beginning to be concerned with Japan’s low level of international aid contribution in comparison to other developed nations. OISCA comes up in such discussions as an



example of an NGO that the government should support in its efforts to “catch up” to the West. For example, in a December 1978 hearing at the Committee on Audit at the House of Councilors, representative Shigenobu Sanji of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), which at the time was politically allied with the LDP, made the following statement (I tried to be as faithful as possible to the colloquial language in the transcript):

I also have an interest in this issue of overseas economic cooperation. I don't have a stance regarding a specific problem or anything, but if I can give two or three examples: there are OISCA's activities in Mindanao, in the Philippines, where they increased rice production together with the local people. In two or three years, they gained the trust of local chiefs and people. So instead of building an agricultural experiment center, if we want to generally increase the production of rice, I think that it would be more helpful if we just had three or four of such young people go work in rice cultivation together with the local farmers... We're going to have many university graduates in the future [in Japan], and I think that instead of looking inwards, they should first jump into local communities; naked, so to speak, without a special idea or technical skill that would make them look at things from above. No matter the problem, to help local people improve from within their own daily worries and lives. I really want to promote the expansion of activities like this because this is what will create the foundation of [our country's] economic cooperation in the future. That is, to send [Japanese] youth, our future leaders, to other countries, especially youth who haven't been taught anything but come to understand things on their own by going into local communities, which I think will produce youth who have a strong sense of purpose in life. [Sanji 1978]

Similarly, about a decade later, in a hearing of the Cabinet Committee, Kimio Fujita, the director of the Economic Cooperation Bureau (later reorganized as the International Cooperation Bureau) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), who eventually became the president of JICA, cited OISCA as an example of cooperation between the Japanese government and NGOs that should be promoted (Fujita 1985). In 1987, OISCA became the first NGO to receive funds from the government's Official Development Assistance (ODA) in order to establish a vocational training center for women in

Bangladesh (Ishibashi 1998).<sup>28</sup> In such ways, OISCA's case foreshadowed the official Japanese ODA schemes for NGOs that began a few years later in 1989 with the establishment of the Grant Assistance for Japanese NGOs and the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects.

Given this overview, it was not inaccurate that the UN official defined OISCA as an exemplary international NGO. After expressing his wishes to work more closely with OISCA, the UN official requested the delegation to share OISCA's experiences with other people around the world so that they could learn from OISCA. He asked them to provide practical advice to people and organizations in other countries—as if the delegation was composed of the actual NGO staff. I am not sure if he knew that they were ordinary citizen-members of OISCA, nor if it mattered to him. I interpreted this appeal to the delegation, wondering if they realized the discrepancy in the UN official's plea and their inability to actually deliver the solution themselves. At the same time, as I spoke, I realized how my delivery of the interpreted request might have emboldened their sense of being part of a larger global effort. Stated differently, my role as an interpreter created a buffer and screen between the two sides, a gap that enabled an exchange with temporal pauses while I interpreted the words, and thereby created an opportunity for each speaker to become something else. It occurred to me that whereas a conversation that does not need an interpreter might have proceeded

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<sup>28</sup> ODA is a term coined by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to measure a country's foreign aid in bilateral and multilateral schemes for economic development and welfare in developing countries. Japan's ODA consists of bilateral aid directly with counterpart governments and multilateral aid to international agencies such as the United Nations. The types of ODA are grant aid that does not require repayment, technical cooperation primarily through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and yen loans given at low interest rates.

with more quick interruptions and corrections of each other's statements, the intervals that my role created rendered that impossible, and instead facilitated a distanced and yet concurring view of each other formed through proxy terms such as "relations" and "international NGO." Misunderstandings of each other and the lack of information, as well as my role as the buffer that impeded them from delving deeper into each other's statements, was key to this relationship (cf. Riles 2010). At the end of my interpretation, Matsumoto expressed that, although people in OISCA have to work with limited budgets, he was happy to know that other people such as the UN felt that OISCA's work was necessary on an international scale. He commented that it made the commitment and effort worthwhile.

As with "relations," I suggest that the term "international NGO" acted as a decoy to veil the fact that the concept entailed various struggles and negotiations in OISCA's history and in the trajectory of Japan's international aid in general. Neither side was interested in unpacking what "international aid" or "NGO" might mean for different actors at different times in the relevant histories; these words served enough of a function for the time being to bind the delegation and the UN official together in the momentary span of the one-hour meeting. And this connection hinged on not knowing precisely what these ideas meant.

A look into the OISCA magazine archives suggests that "international aid" and "NGO" were not prefabricated concepts that landed on OISCA's activities, but seemed to have been produced through its trajectory. I propose, furthermore, that OISCA's understandings of international aid might have informed important political actors in Japan's foreign aid, if not directly on policy-making, at least in the conceptualizations

underpinning it. In short, as I described above, OISCA had strong connections to influential public figures, politicians, and bureaucrats, and I suggest that these relationships enabled OISCA staff to influence official understandings of aid in Japan, to one degree or another.

From one perspective, of course, it might seem that OISCA was simply another pawn in the Japanese government's authoritative schemes of economic growth throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as many scholars have stated. For a long time, Chalmers Johnson's (1982) thesis of the "developmental state" was dominant in viewing Japan's foreign aid as a form of diplomacy and strategy for economic growth, focused on state-led economic development that emphasized infrastructural projects, bilateral aid, and loans (see also Arase 2005; Lee 2008).<sup>29</sup> Although recently scholars have pointed out that Japanese aid did respond to changing international practices and domestic pressures, incorporating more "soft" aid projects and increasing state support of nongovernmental organizations in the 1980s (Lancaster 2010; Leheny and Warren 2010),<sup>30</sup> the general understanding among scholars of Japan has been that non-state actors in international aid have been constrained. As I explained in the introduction, legal restrictions and unfavorable taxation systems on civic groups meant that

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<sup>29</sup> For general analyses of the history of Japanese foreign aid see Arase 1995; Orr 1990; Rix 1980). For an official account, see the English MOFA publication "Japan's Official Development Assistance: Accomplishment and Progress of 50 Years." Online text, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/cooperation/anniv50/pamphlet/index.html>, accessed May 2, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> In 1989 the government set up a Small-scale Grant Assistance Scheme, which continues today and supports grassroots development and humanitarian projects by local entities as well as international and national NGOs, and the NGO Subsidy System, which provides grants to Japanese NGOs working overseas. In 2003, the scheme reinforced the concept of "human security," and is now called Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects. Moreover, in 2008 JICA was merged with JBIC to centralize the three areas of aid—technical cooperation, loan aid, and grant aid—under the new slogan "Inclusive and Dynamic Development." The new JICA's strategic mission to address global issues, poverty reduction, improvement of governance and public services, and human security reflects efforts to redirect Japanese aid even more in line with international norms.

organizations were limited in their operations before the NPO Law of 1998 (Amemiya 1998; Kawashima 2001), when it first became possible for nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations to register officially without having to secure political connections and large initial capital. The narrative is that, until then, nonprofit and NGO activities were governed by a “top-down model” in which “activism has not merely bubbled up from below; it has been cultivated from above” by the state and international political structures (Reimann 2010: 2). In this framework, OISCA, especially with its relationships with politicians and bureaucrats, would be seen as a paradigmatic case of an organization governed by top-down structures.

One of the most ambitious proposals of this dissertation is that OISCA’s history challenges this conclusion that NGOs in Japan are purveyors of state interests, or at most, struggling in the constraints of an authoritarian state. Neither is it like activist movements that overtly challenge the state and existing structures of inequality, as is probably evident by now (Chan 2008). I suggest a more ambiguous storyline in which OISCA, as one of the first international NGOs in Japan that emerged before official foreign aid systems were in place, was able to exert some influence on state actors through the relations that its staff cultivated with prominent public figures. This was neither a cooption nor a challenge to the state, but a form of exchange that suggests how understandings of international aid in Japan are not simply “given” to its people from state officials and readings of statistical data, but actually co-constructed among various actors.

One attempt at tracing relationships might illustrate the point. Shū Kitano (2011) pinpoints the beginning of the term “international cooperation” to the establishment of JICA. According to him, the main players in the creation of JICA and the idea of international cooperation were an LDP politician named Tetsurō Minato and the

members of the new cabinet that prime minister Kakuei Tanaka created in November of 1973—Masayoshi Ōhira as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yasuhiro Nakasone as Minister for International Trade and Industry (future prime minister), Tadao Kuraishi as Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, and Takeo Fukuda as the Minister of Finance (future prime minister) (Kitano 2011: 38-39). Specifically, Kitano explains that Minato developed the term “international cooperation” from an idea that Fukuda gave him (Kitano 2011: 40). Kitano proposes that there is thus a high probability that the term “international cooperation” began with Fukuda, Minato, and these cabinet members.

Even if Kitano were wrong about these men being the founders of the idea of international cooperation, the connections between the names he gives and OISCA is compelling. Ōhira, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, for example, was one of the start-up members of the OISCA Diet League in 1967 (OISCA 1967), and in a listing of OISCA Diet League members from 1971, one can find the name of Tadao Kuraishi as well (OISCA 1971). In November 1970, OISCA sent a team to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to help survivors of cyclone Bhola, and the message of encouragement on behalf of the Cabinet and other prominent figures included the name of Kakuei Tanaka, LDP Secretary General at the time (OISCA 1970). In an article from 1973, the names of Takeo Fukuda and Ōhira appear alongside others sending congratulatory messages to OISCA for Yonosuke Nakano’s receipt of the Silver Cup with the Chrysanthemum Crest Set from the Cabinet Office (OISCA 1973). In 1979, Fukuda, who was prime minister at the time, gave a speech at an OISCA event where he stated that OISCA was advancing the “heart to heart” understanding that he promoted as part of the 1977 Fukuda Doctrine (OISCA 1979).<sup>31</sup> This quick overview suggests that influential

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<sup>31</sup> “Fukuda Doctrine,” <http://old.asean.or.jp/eng/asean40/fukuda.html>, accessed on May 2, 2012.

politicians and bureaucrats who were involved in the shaping of international aid in Japan were at least aware of OISCA's activities, if not influenced by them.

Although one could interpret this connection, once again, as evidence of state actors' cooption of OISCA or collusion between the two, what I suggest is that it is not a one-sided story. On one level, at first, politicians and bureaucrats in the 1960s and even early 1970s did not embrace OISCA, since it seemed to pose a threat as a "competitor" for the newborn government schemes in international aid. When OISCA began its agricultural assistance overseas, the Japanese government had just begun similar activities. In 1961, developed countries from Europe and the United States established the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), and its sub-organization to discuss issues of international development and poverty reduction, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which Japan joined in 1964. In Japan, the precursor to JICA, the Overseas Technical Cooperation Agency (OTCA), was established in 1962, and the Japanese version of the Peace Corp, the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV), began in 1965. Although these were ostensibly development aid programs, ODA in Japan during these early years was seen as a way to pay war reparations to Asian countries and to foster bilateral trade relations, and thus government officials in Japan did not see civic organizations such as OISCA as potential partners. Thus, as one OISCA staff member who went with the first team to India in the early 1960s explained to me, when the OISCA team first visited the Japanese embassy in Delhi, the ambassador and embassy ministers told them that they were being a nuisance (*meiwaku*), that agricultural aid was difficult even for government agencies and thus impossible for private organizations such as OISCA, and told them to go back to Japan because they would be a national embarrassment (personal communication, December 7, 2009).

But OISCA continued its activities in India, since these initial projects were financed by OISCA staff and other Ananaikyō members, and they did not need to follow the embassy's orders. Eventually OISCA gained recognition from the Japanese government when it successfully increased agricultural production and introduced new farming techniques at its field sites. Shōichi Ban, who served as a diplomat in India and subsequently became one of the founders of JOCV, writes that during his time overseas he came to admire OISCA as a group of people who were so committed to their work that they devoted their whole lives living with local villagers (Ban 1974). Similarly, in an essay from 1974, the former Delhi bureau chief of Asahi Shimbun, one of the major newspapers in Japan, wrote about the rugged, simple Japanese farmers from OISCA who would bring fresh, delicious vegetables to important events at the Japanese embassy. He reminisced how these OISCA people, who had experienced poverty in postwar rural Japan and could withstand the harsh conditions of rural India that Europeans and Americans could not, presented a good image of the Japanese overseas (Hayashi 1974: 87-89).

Such stories traveled back to Japan through news correspondents and embassy officials, gradually bolstering OISCA's reputation within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and aid agencies. Given this history, I suggest that OISCA's relationship with state actors was not the expression of a unitary position, as conspiracy theorists might imagine, but a more nuanced development of various moments in time and fortuitous encounters. As a research group on Japanese NGOs concludes in a 1983 report, OISCA seemed to be an exception to the rule amongst groups registered as incorporated foundations, because although it received ODA funds, it conducted "voluntary" and "independent" (*jishuteki*) activities outside of government directives (NGO Kenkyū Group 1983: 31).



Another important point to note is that the relationships between OISCA and politicians were not only about political interests. Certainly, given the high-level connections that one could gain through OISCA, some of the reasons for joining the OISCA Diet League were to secure votes in elections and gain political clout. As political scientist Minoru Nakano (1993) shows, Diet Leagues (*giin renmei*) in Japan have historically served to advance the interests of certain industries or policies, and politicians join them with the expectation that the personal relationships cultivated through such associations will help them obtain support for certain issues or overall political influence in the Diet. However, as one LDP politician and current member of the OISCA Diet League laughingly said, the number of votes in an election that one can gain through OISCA “is not much.” But he agreed that being part of this community did provide him with good relationships with other politicians. However, the reasons were not simply political. Having been a member for thirty years, he confessed that what he enjoyed the most was the fact that the OISCA Diet League was an association of pure (*junsui*), serious (*majime*), and good people (*ii hito*) who were not driven by calculations of interest (*rigai*) and other “icky” things (*dorodoro shita mono ga nai*) (personal communication, August 18, 2010).

Politicians told me that another reason for joining the OISCA Diet League was the chance to visit some of OISCA’s overseas projects. They seemed to take these opportunities as invaluable first-hand experiences of aid work as it is conducted by a Japanese NGO, and accordingly, an occasion to develop their own understanding of international aid. In a discussion between Shigeru Ishiba and Seiken Sugiura, prominent LDP politicians, published in the OISCA magazine, the two men recounted their experiences visiting OISCA’s projects around Southeast Asia. They talked about the importance of NGOs such as OISCA in Japan’s aid efforts because they can commit

to activities over the long term and nurture close trusting relations with local communities, unlike government projects that have a restrictive time limit (OISCA 2000). In an interview, a current member of the OISCA Diet League explained to me that what was meaningful for him about being a member was that on the trips to field sites, he had to drive through rough dirt roads and ride on small boats for hours to reach OISCA's project sites. There, he was able to see for himself how hard Japanese NGO workers were working in remote places around the world. This was different from the official trips that he took as a politician, in which he was usually shuttled from office to office among government agencies in the capitals of those countries. "It's about the importance of the field (*gemba*)," he said, "which is something I value in my own political commitments as well" (personal communication, April 15, 2010).

What I want to indicate here is that the story of the relationship between NGOs and the state in Japan is not as uniform or unidirectional as we might assume. Early organizations such as OISCA were not against the Japanese state, nor handmaidens of political authorities. Rather, how understandings of international aid developed, particularly aid conducted by nongovernmental groups, was contingent on the various interpersonal interactions and exchanges that took place between OISCA staff, politicians, bureaucrats, and others. If this was the case, then, and we can suppose that OISCA had an influence on how politicians and state officials envisioned the philosophy, form, and effects of international aid work by NGOs, one would have to entertain the possibility that OISCA's mission, rooted in Nakano's universal spiritual visions of world peace, and its history of advocating ideas of "Japanese values," had an impact on official views about aid. Specifically, I suggest that OISCA's global culturalism might have shaped dominant understandings of international aid in Japan.

Global culturalism was based on comparisons between Japan and other countries, especially “the West,” and on positing OISCA as occupying the “missing middle” between these categories. OISCA constructed understandings of international aid as well as itself as a global actor by creating conceptual gaps that assumed incommensurable spheres and rejected categorical ambiguities. This differs from the view of NGOs as transnational mediators or articulators that interlock different scalar concerns (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Markowitz 2001; Schuller 2009). The point was to unfasten categories and create a “missing middle.” Therefore, in this sense, this dynamic of gaps also differs from analyses of the paradoxes and contradictions of neoliberal or cosmopolitan regimes. NGOs are often analyzed as part of various forms of neoliberal governance (Englund 2006; Kamat 2003; Schuller 2007; Sharma 2006; Veltmeyer and Petras 2005), and although in Japan the tendency has been to analyze civic groups within top-down models, some scholars have also seen Japanese NGOs as examples of the neoliberalization of aid in Japan (Hirata 2002; Yamamoto 1998; see also Ogawa 2009). In many of these analyses, NGOs are portrayed as having universal humanitarian intentions, but end up playing a role in the neoliberalization and unequal governance of the world. This conclusion, in fact, is embedded in theories of neoliberalism themselves. For example, David Harvey (2005) explains that one could see neoliberalism either as a utopian project or a political scheme, the first of many contradictions that constitutes neoliberalism in his view (Harvey 2005:19). In fact, Andrea Muehlebach (2009) has shown that the hegemonic force of neoliberalism is that it can embrace two registers that appear to be oppositional. In terms of cosmopolitanism, scholars have explored the concept as an “actually existing” space in local and embodied ways that nevertheless strive for liberal universals, thus pulled in contradictory orientations between freedom and instrumentalization (see Cheah 1998,

2006; Robbins 1998, 1999). According to these analyses, then, it is not surprising that NGOs seem to produce unintended effects, because contradictions are not threats to regimes of neoliberal and cosmopolitan governance, but constitutive of them.

My perspective in light of OISCA is slightly different in that I am not concerned with identifying the hegemonic force that brings such oppositions together, but rather in the possibility of such contradictions in offering a role for OISCA to occupy the “missing middle” as a stake on globality. Revealing the contradictions in neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism as the analytic merely reflects the gaps that enable NGOs to emerge as gatekeepers of the “missing middle.” Thus, I suggest that the conceptual gaps and seeming paradoxes in neoliberalism or cosmopolitanism are already prefigured by NGOs, which make use of such gaps to generate scale. In other words, the analytic is already the ethnographic object in these studies (Riles 2000).

What is significant here is that it differs from the argument by some scholars that “cosmopolitan practices come to be seen as mixtures of things believed to have been previously unmixed” (Pollock et al. 2000: 587). OISCA’s case shows how the dwelling in the “missing middle” reinforces the work of purification. If cosmopolitanism is inherently about mixtures, OISCA’s form of globality is not that. Thus, according to OISCA, the activities of international aid and the international NGO, from participation in global meetings to agricultural training in villages, were premised particularly on the “gaps” between cultures and on maintaining those openings—the failures of communication making the brief moments of successful exchange (but not the closing of the gaps) that much more compelling.

Tadashi Watanabe is one of the central characters in this story. Having joined Nakano’s movements as a young man, he has played a key role in OISCA’s development for over half a century. Yet, he stands out among the elder staff in that he

speaks English, is not a farmer, and has had extensive experience participating in international conferences in New York, Geneva, and elsewhere as OISCA's representative. In what follows, I draw on Watanabe's reports from such high-profile conferences to demonstrate how he constructed a dichotomous worldview of "Japan" versus "the West," "the West" versus the rest of the world (which includes Japan). Watanabe is only one person, to be sure, but I suggest that the abundance of his articles in the OISCA magazine and his clear position in the organization as the face of OISCA in international circles—the World Bank, the UN, and amongst foreign dignitaries—indicate that his perspectives have been dominant in OISCA and its messages to others.

Specifically, based on the magazine articles, I show how the experiences overseas seemed to elicit two reactions in Watanabe: on the one hand, he upheld "Japanese" approaches and ways of doing things in contrast to what he saw as Euro-American trends; on the other hand, he expressed admiration for Western countries that already valued international aid and NGOs, something that he advocated for the Japanese government to do and "catch up" to the West. This kind of comparison and reification of Japan and the West, and the sense of temporal lag, are familiar discourses of simultaneous inferiority and uniqueness of Japan (*Nihonjinron*) (Kelly 1991; Miyazaki 2003; Moeran 1996). What I think was productive for Watanabe, and probably for OISCA in general, in using this inferiority-uniqueness dyad is that it mobilizes acts of comparison that place the NGO in the space of the "missing middle" that buffers the two sides. In other words, although acting as the proxy for the middle could foreground ambiguities, it can also effectively quarantine the opposite categories away from each other. In this sense, OISCA's act of "reclaiming" orientalist discourses—in "counter-orientalism" (Moeran 1996) or "auto-orientalism" (Mazzarella 2003), for example—does not simply collapse the subject and object of cultural commodity

consumption. In fact, it produces the designation of subjects and objects in the first place, that is, the categorization of “the western” as the subject and “the oriental” as the object, or its reverse as might be the case in self-orientalizing or occidentalizing moves. There is no room for the possibility that the person is neither the subject nor object of orientalism or occidentalism, or is both at the same time (see Carrier 1992).

In a report about attending the fifth meeting of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Manila, Watanabe writes that he was struck, not for the first time, by the differences between “Western NGOs” and OISCA (Watanabe 1979). He explains that Western NGOs seemed to merely respond to all the demands of developing countries—he does not specify what these were—because of their sympathetic attitudes to their former colonies. In contrast, he writes, OISCA advocated to other organizations that the role of developed countries is to create a foundation for self-reliance (*jiritsu*) for developing countries through “making persons” (*hitozukuri*). He argues that accepting all the requests from developing countries would hinder their abilities of self-help (*jijo doryoku*) and delay their progress (*hatten*). He laments that Western NGOs did not seem to understand OISCA’s view (Watanabe 1979: 18). Sixteen years later, when OISCA received the ECOSOC Category I status, Watanabe portrays this recognition as proof that “the kind of steady activity based on the hardworking spirit (*kinbensa*) and humility (*kenkyosa*) flowing through the blood of the Japanese [evinced in OISCA’s activities], now works (*tsūyō suru*) in the international community” (Watanabe 1995b: 10). He adds that this was an occasion for OISCA to move toward becoming even more of an “earth NGO (*chikyū NGO*).”

At the same time, articles in the OISCA magazine indicate that OISCA’s overseas activities provided occasions for staff and supporters alike to reassess “Japan.” In a January 1986 roundtable discussion among politicians, bureaucrats, and Yoshiko

Nakano, Kimio Fujita from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) tells the others that he was deeply impressed with OISCA's approach to training, in which there was a strong emphasis on "the spirit" (*seishin*) of work and on going out to "the field" (*gemba*), describing this as a uniquely Japanese way. He states that new employees at Japanese railway companies, regardless of their levels of education, would always start with clipping tickets. He gives the example of Noboru Gotō, heir of Tokyu Corporation and future president of the Japan Chamber of Commerce, who started his career cleaning toilets (OISCA 1986: 21). In this discussion, there was a shared understanding of "Japanese ways" as emphasizing bodily practice in "the field" in any profession, as evinced in a number of scholarly works on company trainings, schooling, and artisanship (Kondo 1990; Rohlen 1974; Singleton 1998). Simultaneously, in the end Fujita laments the fact that young Japanese people seemed to think increasingly in "Western" ways about aid, that is, seeing developing countries with pity (*kawaisō*) (OISCA 1986: 18).

But over a decade later, Fujita, then the president of JICA, writes that Japanese aid had been characterized by an emphasis on the field (*gemba shugi*), but that Japanese people had to learn to use their words as well. He stresses that Japanese people needed to shift from seeing virtue in "deeds without words" (*fugen jikkō*) to "deeds with words" (*yūgen jikkō*), that is, in the ability to both act and explain the action (OISCA 1998: 11). OISCA's Watanabe had in fact already made this argument in 1976. When he attended the 13th General Meeting of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN in Geneva, he reported that he saw how misunderstood Japan was amongst other developed countries, that is, seen to be the same as the U.S. and an "economic animal." He confessed that although Japanese people tended to value "deeds without words" (*fugen jikkō*), he realized that in interactions with people from other countries, Japanese people

needed to learn to say things clearly (Watanabe 1976: 22). This was a “Western” value that Watanabe felt was needed among Japanese aid actors, including OISCA. Thus, in addition to the emphasis on “Japanese values,” throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Watanabe also praised Western countries for their commitment to international cooperation and support of NGOs, and repeatedly stressed the need to similarly elevate the importance of NGOs in the eyes and policies of Japanese state actors. In an essay from 1984, for example, he points to the Japanese government’s lack of support for NGOs, unlike in Western countries, and thus the weakness of Japanese people’s “international-ness” (*kokusaisei*) (Watanabe 1984b).

The combination of these moves—(re)affirming ideas of “Japaneseness” and reassessing it in light of “the West”—seemed to enable the construction of OISCA as the cross-cultural buffer. This, of course, relied on the reification of each category, smoothing out internal differentiations, such as the generational changes occurring in Japan, the different groups that constitute Japanese society, the various constituencies of “the West,” as well as the constantly changing political relationships between Japan and other countries. The middle had to be constructed as missing. This erasure of differences and incoherence seemed suitable for international agencies as well. For example, according to Watanabe, a World Bank official did not see any problems in asking OISCA to become the spokesperson for NGOs in Japan and stay in close contact with the World Bank office in Tokyo (Watanabe 1984a). The work of the “missing middle” involved in becoming an international NGO enabled OISCA to emerge as an important enactor of Japan’s globality precisely in the space that was missing between contrasting categories.



Matsumoto expressed gratitude to the UN official for the support and hopes that the UN seemed to be placing on OISCA. The UN official nodded, and mentioned that ECOSOC's Commission for Sustainable Development organizes an event every summer, and the UN NGO Section would be happy to co-sponsor an event there with OISCA. He reiterated again the importance of transmitting OISCA's experience, especially to NGOs in the global south such as in the Sahel region in Africa and Latin America. He explained that people in places such as the Amazon tend to cut trees for fuel; while reforestation is important, he stated that what is necessary is to prevent people from cutting trees in the first place. "I would like groups like OISCA to provide practical advice about how to do that," he told the delegation. "The question is how people can make a living and also care for the forests. I would like you to come up with specific recommendations and practical advice for how to address this problem, and how to use forests efficiently." He proceeded to mention the upcoming Rio+20 Conference happening in June 2011, and urged OISCA to take part in these discussions. He stressed that one of the most important global challenges today is to shift the economy to a green economy. "This can't be done by governments only; the UN has to rely on NGOs and other new partners. In this sense, OISCA is one of the best examples," he repeated. "I would like to extend closer cooperation."

As I interpreted every few sentences to the delegation, people around the table nodded in agreement. When the UN official was finished speaking, Matsumoto leaned forward to respond, pointing out that Nakamura, the senior OISCA staff member in the room, was in fact heading to Rio the next day to begin preparations for Rio+20. Nakamura stood up and explained in English that he was going to meet with Japanese alumni from the Tokyo University of Agriculture who are living in Brazil in order to begin reforestation and food production projects with them. Was this collaboration

between OISCA and Japanese expats in Latin America what the UN official had in mind? I assume that it was not, but nothing else was said, and I did not have time to interpret Nakamura's explanation for the Japanese delegates, as the UN official, who had received a reply in English, went ahead to thank the delegation for their visit and to wish them a nice stay in New York.

## **The Foil**

On that day in April 2012, what became apparent to me was the importance of the lack of information in a particular encounter that was conceived to be an expression of a "global" relationship. As scholars have pointed out in studying the impact of translators/interpreters on a given situation (Pérez-González 2012; Pöllabauer 2004), I was a significant cog in the mechanism of this interaction between the English-speaking UN official and the Japanese-speaking OISCA delegation, specifically in my role as an interpreter that made the relational gaps apparent in fumbling for words and purposefully interpreting "religion" as *seishin* rather than *shūkyō*, for example. This particular skewing of the interpretation seemed important to me because of OISCA's ambivalent history with Ananaikyō and Japanese people's general apprehension regarding "religion," as I explain in chapter two. The interaction was based upon such misunderstandings, to which I undoubtedly contributed, as the UN official did not know OISCA's history, or its deep relationships with conservative politicians and public figures. Within this relational gap, moreover, there was a story of another gap, that is, the conceptual "missing middle" between the categories of "Japan" and "the West" that OISCA's senior staff members and supporters have upheld for decades. I suggested that this view of international aid in Japan as constituted upon such national-cultural gaps allowed OISCA staff to claim to occupy that "missing middle"—not as a

mediator that articulated between contingent elements, but as the gatekeeper of these opposed categories. As with the limitations of the double-bind, I proposed that the analytical tool of the “paradox” in studies of neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism seems to conceal more than it reveals, obscuring the ways that the seeming contradictions are themselves instruments for aid actors. In contrast, looking at the ways that relational and conceptual gaps played an important role in creating the effects of globality in OISCA allows us to consider how aid actors work with the opposition between things and the attempts to communicate across that space, without closing the gap. That is, it points to the dynamic of the “double-take.”

In conclusion, or rather in anticipation to the rest of the dissertation, I point to a third gap here. In presenting the two forms of gaps in this chapter, one relational and the other conceptual, I also relied on the gap between them to make my point. In other words, my “analysis” depended on formulating this third gap between “practices” and “concepts,” and suggesting parallel workings of gaps in the two domains. In this way, I proposed that OISCA’s view of aid work was framed by global culturalist claims that were based on the analogous existence of these two kinds of gaps. In the ensuing chapters, I implicitly replicate and exploit this third gap to articulate the argument that understandings of aid work among the various aid actors in OISCA emerged from the incongruence and hence dynamic between global culturalism and the “muddiness” of intercultural and interpersonal relations in the practices of *hitozukuri* aid work. Thus, the mechanisms of global culturalism described in this chapter serve as a foil for the rest of the dissertation.

David Mosse (2005), in his study of the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) and its projects in western India, argued that “the disjuncture between policy and practice is not... an unfortunate gap to be bridged between

intention and action; it is a necessity, actively maintained and reproduced" (231). He proceeded to demonstrate an ethnographic analysis of the ways that aid actors mobilized these gaps and tried to create "success" in policy out of the messiness of practice. The chapters that follow are, in a way, an illustration of the reverse: how aid actors foregrounded the struggles, ambivalences, and transformations that arise from proximate relations in "the field," undoing the claims of global culturalism that underlie their work. But as such, the two are mutually constitutive, as the difficult struggles to contend and connect with others in fieldwork would not have meaning without the divisions assumed in global culturalist views, and vice versa.

## **CHAPTER 2: Crisis, Loss, Renewal—The Redemptive Dream of Aid**

### **The Life of Discipline at the Training Centers**

When I asked a senior Japanese staffer at the Tokyo headquarter what was the most important aspect of OISCA's activities, he told me that the communal lifestyle and the morning routines at the training centers were non-negotiable (personal communication, December 2, 2009). Other Japanese staff also stressed at various times the importance of the training programs to OISCA's "style" of aid work. Although the growing numbers of corporate donors preferred OISCA's environmental projects such as mangrove reforestation, presumably because they were easier to quantify and justify than "making persons" to employees, OISCA staff invariably told me that the training programs in Japan and overseas were what characterized OISCA.

OISCA's activities revolve around its training centers: four centers in Japan for youth from around the world and sixteen centers around the Asia-Pacific for local village youth. The sizes vary, from approximately a dozen trainees per year at a training center in Japan, to hundreds at a center in Papua New Guinea. Japanese staff run the training centers in Japan, and one or two Japanese workers and dozens of local staff members manage the training centers overseas. Staff and trainees live together in these training centers, sharing meals, communal baths, and collective duties such as cleaning, in addition to the management and implementation of projects.

【TIME TABLE】		
時間 1月～12月 (5月～9月)	基礎研修 1月～4月	本研修 5月～12月
5:50	起床、洗顔	
6:05	点呼、国旗掲揚 体操、ジョギングなど 朝の行事後 掃除	
7:00(7:30)	朝食	
8:10～9:20	1時間目	農業研修/講義 8:15～11:55
9:30～10:40	2時間目	
10:50～12:00	3時間目	
12:00	昼食	
13:00～14:10	4時間目	農業研修/講義 13:15～16:55(5月、6月、9月) 13:30～17:15(7月、8月) 13:15～16:40(10月～12月)
14:20～15:30	5時間目	
15:40～16:50	6時間目	
17:00	国旗降納	
18:00(18:30)	夕食	
19:30～20:00	スタッフ、研修生会議 (土曜日は研修生会議、日曜日は20:00に点呼)	
21:50	テレビ、ラジオ、オーディオ類の電源を消す ※休日前は22:50	
22:00	就寝、消灯	
22:50	教室、消灯	

※ 入浴時間 : 国旗降納後～19:30

※ 切手、テレホンカード(国際電話カードチャージ含む)の販売 : 国旗降納後～21:30

※ 電話・コンピューター・インターネット使用可能時間 : 国旗降納後～21:30

※ 消灯後は教室を利用してください(22:50まで)

※ 休日前の就寝時間 : 23:00

※ 休日 : 朝のスケジュールが遅くなります(起床 6:45、点呼 7:00)

\* オイスカ中部日本研修センター \*

5:50	Wake up
6:05	Tenko, cleaning
7:00	Breakfast*
8:10 -11:55	Agricultural training/Lectures (3 class periods)
12:00	Lunch
13:15 -16:55	Agricultural training/Lectures (3 class periods)*
17:00	Lowering of flags
18:00	Dinner*
19:30 -20:00	Staff/trainee meeting
21:50	Electronics off*
22:00	Bedtime, lights out
22:50	All lights out

Figure 8: Timetable from the Chūbu training center.

\*Time change on Sundays, holidays, and different seasons.

Although there are variations, all of the training centers follow a similar lifestyle and schedule, which begins at dawn with a particular morning routine. I took part in one of these routines in Japan for the first time in November 2009. The day began at 6:05 a.m., the time for *tenko* (roll call). When I arrived outside the building at 6 a.m., most people were already lined up in front of the main glass doors. The trainees—including from the Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Burma/Myanmar,

Panama, and Turkey—were lined up in two rows in front of the building’s main doors, and the Japanese staff stood to the trainees’ right-hand side.

Once the chime struck, the young Japanese staff in front shouted, “Dress right, dress!” (*Migi e narae!*) Everyone put their left hands on their hips and turned their heads to the right, measuring the correct distance between each other. The Japanese staff yelled, “Begin clothing inspection!” (*Fukusō tenken hajime!*) We all straightened our clothes and hats. “Stop!” (*Yame!*) the Japanese staff ordered. At this point, two other Japanese staff members walked to the front, did an about-turn, marched into the building, and proceeded to take out folded flags, one at a time. These were the flags of the trainees’ countries, the Japanese flag, and the OISCA flag. The staff and trainees ceremoniously saluted each flag and carried them to the courtyard.



Figure 9: Tenko (roll call) at the Chūbu training center.

When all the flags were tied to flagpoles but not yet raised, the trainees divided into groups, and roll call began. For a few minutes there was a cacophony of voices as groups yelled commands and numbers, but within ten minutes there was silence once again. One of the trainees shouted, “Salute to the teacher!” (*Sensei ni rei!*) The group leaders for that week gave a quick bow to the Japanese staff member who was leading roll call, and gave their reports in turn, in Japanese.

“Trainee group one, total four members, missing one member, current status three members! Missing member is resting in her room!” (*Kenshūsei dai ippan, sōin yon mei, ketsuin ichimei, genzai in sanmei! Ketsuin ichimei wa heya de yasundemasu!*)

“Number!” (*Bangō!*) the group leader yelled out.

“One! Two! Three!” (*Ichi! Ni! San!*) each group member yelled back.

“Nothing else to report!” (*Ijō arimasen!*) yelled the leader.

Each utterance was shouted succinctly, and if there was a noticeable pause or hesitation, the Japanese staffer made the trainee do it again. After all the groups had gone through this roll call, the trainees raised the flags, one at a time, and we saluted each flag again. The last portion of the routine was “radio exercises” (*rajio taisō*). Radio exercises are a set of stretching exercises created by the Kanpo postal insurance system in 1928, modeled after the Czech Sokol movement and the American radio calisthenics by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in the 1920s (I. Kuroda 1999). After it was modified in the 1950s to remove allusions to prewar militarism, it reappeared on the radio and on the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) TV station in the mornings, and is now a ubiquitous activity used in various institutions in Japan, from elementary schools to companies.





Figure 10: Raising the flags at the Nishinihon training center.

OISCA staff upheld the value of these morning routines as practices of discipline (*kiritsu*) in order to strengthen the body and spirit of trainees and staff so that they could become effective leaders of development efforts in the future. One staff explained the importance of the morning disciplinary practices in this manner:

For these trainees, who will go back and work for their communities, it is important to live in a collective setting such as this and learn how to cooperate with others, how to fuse together into one harmony, accepting each other's differences. When we do these disciplinary exercises, if the first person doing "dress right, dress" is even slightly off, the last person in line will be completely off. And if everyone can move in harmony, everything will fall into place, and work can be completed quickly... If someone is slow or late, the whole group is pushed back, and everyone will be affected. The "spirit" that OISCA teaches is that basic thing that you need for collective living. The point is not just to be strict... The point is to motivate people first thing in the morning to cultivate a feeling of becoming one, disciplining one's self and working toward harmony. [Personal communication, November 10, 2009]

As this representative view indicated, the importance of discipline lay in the value of the collective, and in learning to set aside one's self for the harmony of the group. This staff member, as well as the other Japanese staff, were aware that outside observers such as JICA officials were alarmed at the morning routines and the general emphasis

on discipline at the training centers. Given that JICA funded some of the trainees who came to OISCA's training centers in Japan, officials had repeatedly asked OISCA to change the style of the training courses. They were horrified to see representatives of foreign governments and elite institutions subjected to such disciplinary lifestyles in Japan. Although it still seemed strict to me, the complaints had apparently had an effect, and staff told me that the training approach had relaxed compared to a couple of years earlier. Yet, the morning routines were still in place. Japanese staff were clearly used to being questioned about them—they always had prepared answers to my questions regarding the meaning of the roll call and morning practices.

The morning routines were followed by cleaning duties that everybody shared, including the director of the training center. Groups of trainees and staff took turns cleaning the bathrooms, the hallways, the classrooms, and other spaces around the building. The method of cleaning was specific, as Japanese staff instructed trainees to sweep, wipe, and wash things in particular ways. Immediately after the twenty or thirty minutes of cleaning was breakfast time. Meals took place in the dining room. The Japanese cooking staff and the female domestic science (*kaseika*) trainees prepared the food and portioned the plates equally for each person. Once everyone was sitting down, the person in charge that week would announce, "Bring your hands together, itadakimasu!" (*te wo awasete, itadakimasu!*), and everybody else would repeat the phrase before picking up their chopsticks to eat.<sup>32</sup> People could usually have a second or third helping of rice, but nothing else. I was always left hungry, and wondered how the trainees survived each day given the high levels of physical labor involved in the agricultural work that constituted their lessons. It seemed that all of them lost weight

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<sup>32</sup> "Itadakimasu" is the expression used in Japan before each meal. At the end of each meal, the expression is "gochisōsama."

after spending a year at OISCA's training centers in Japan. At the end of each meal, the group of trainees and staff that was in charge of washing the dishes that week cleaned up.



Figure 11: Lunchtime at the Chūbu training center.

The demands on the body were rigorous at the training centers in Japan, and every time I visited one, by lunchtime I was exhausted. The one-hour break before the afternoon session did not feel long enough to recover from the farm work of the morning classes. If we had been planting new crops, we would be hoeing the soil to prepare it for seeds or seedlings, one long ridge after another. My back would hurt after one or two trips down the field, creaking like a badly-oiled hinge every time I tried to straighten myself. As many of the Japanese OISCA staff explained to me over the course of my fieldwork, what characterized OISCA's trainings was the focus on practice-based learning rather than classroom-based theories of agriculture. Thus, I was

told that trainees spent about eighty percent of the time outdoors and only twenty percent of the time indoors.

I thought that the physical work might be easier for the trainees, who had been chosen based on their interest and experience in sustainable agriculture, but it turned out that it was tiring for them as well—at least for some of them. OISCA's emphasis on bodily pedagogies had in fact created a schism between trainees of different socioeconomic backgrounds. Those who came from the OISCA training centers overseas for a secondary training were mostly rural village youth (called "OISCA trainees"), whereas those who came selected and funded by JICA were mainly government officials or educated professionals in the field of development or agriculture (called "JICA trainees").<sup>33</sup> I could not disagree with OISCA staff who pointed out that the former tended to accept the demanding form of work and collective life at the training center, while the latter complained about the lack of theoretical instructions, the amount of physical labor, the fact that they had to clean and do chores, the emphasis on discipline, and the lack of privacy. Phrased in another way, class-based distinctions were reproduced in trainees' expectations of "knowledge" and how it should be transmitted: the OISCA trainees accepted the silent, embodied form of learning required of them while the JICA trainees wanted a pedagogy that focused on theoretical concepts and verbal communication. Thus it was that a JICA trainee from Bangladesh whom I met at one the training centers in Japan, upon finding out that I spoke fluent English and was a doctoral candidate, exclaimed, "You are the first resource person I've met here!" When I asked him what he meant, he explained bitterly that I was the first educated person that he had met at OISCA, and that he was hoping

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<sup>33</sup> By the time of my fieldwork, only one training center in Japan had JICA trainees. The rest were OISCA trainees, or trainees funded by the Mitsubishi-UFJ Financial Group.

to take courses in a nearby university in the latter half of his training to make up for the lack of such lessons at the training center (personal communication, November 8, 2009). I heard similar complaints from other JICA trainees over the course of my fieldwork in Japan, but never from the OISCA trainees.

The use of disciplinary practices in trainings and education can be found in various institutions in Japan, and, as such, there is probably nothing surprising in the emphasis on discipline in OISCA. The appreciation of discipline as a way to foster harmony in a collectivity such as a school or a company, for example, is a well-trodden analysis in scholarship on Japan (Kondo 1990; Rohlen 1974). Moreover, as Michel Foucault has demonstrated, discipline is a foundational method in the formation of modern subjects in general. However, what I found striking in OISCA's morning routines was that the disciplinary practices also played a role in evoking a sense of pastness for many staff and observers. A staff member told me that one of the purposes of OISCA's training was to teach trainees the values and practices of discipline and proper conduct that "Japanese people have forgotten" (*nihonjin ga wasurete kita koto*) (personal communication, April 22, 2010). These lost values, such as the importance of community over individuality, she suggested, were recaptured in the disciplinary practices, and would prove to be helpful to trainees in their development efforts. As such, discipline did not have an automatically embodied effect on particular subjects, but rather was consciously perceived to be something of the past in one way or another. The disciplinary practices did not produce Foucauldian subjects that were wholly conditioned by certain social and power structures. The question of whether to accept it or not was always visible.

In this chapter I argue that the allusions to things past such as through the disciplinary practices were responses to a sense of national and global crisis that

permeated OISCA's activities. Thus, references to a national, historical, or cultural Japanese past were formulated as responses to crises—specifically, as ways to “redo” the past in another way. This was not an attempt to return to some “golden age” in the past. In fact, while senior Japanese staff emphasized “Japanese values” in OISCA's activities, a dominant view since its establishment was that these values were being lost, or already lost, in Japan, due to the forces of Western modernization. As such, there was an evocation of national decay among senior staff and supporters that went hand-in-hand with the validation of “Japanese values,” and the conclusion was that help would need to be sought outside its national borders. In order to prepare for this moment, emphasis was placed on upholding the lost “Japanese values” in other countries so that their trajectory would differ from the doomed future of Japan. I suggest that international aid work was thereby understood among OISCA's Japanese aid actors as a “redemptive dream,” a form of second chance to do modernity differently elsewhere.

However, the meanings and values of the past were contested between people of different generations, the elderly Japanese staff and supporters seeing this past as a “Japanese culture” to uphold, and the younger ones generally detecting undesirable hints of an imperialist-militarist past or simply irrelevant anachronisms. In other words, the construction of a sense of national-cultural crisis in Japan had the effect of linking references to the past to references to “Japaneseness,” the performative effects of crisis bringing together pastness, national-culturalism, and international aid work in ways that created rifts between different generations of Japanese aid actors. Thus, if intimations of pastness were responses to a sense of crisis experienced especially by the older Japanese staff and supporters, the foregrounding of memories and values of the past—such as from the Second World War—in turn triggered feelings of crisis among

younger aid actors. The conceptualization of aid work as a redemptive dream highlighted the generational gaps that ran through much of OISCA's activities.

Thus, on the one hand, the senior staff, who were all Ananaikyō members, often referred to the emphasis on discipline—the morning routines, punctuality, work ethics, and so on—as an expression of Japanese traditional values to uphold. On the other hand, one senior staff member told me that after a group of young newly hired officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spent a few days at OISCA as part of their training, they wrote feedback that called OISCA rightwing, militaristic, and anachronistic (personal communication, May 17, 2010). Similarly, many young Japanese workers, most of them not Ananaikyō members, told me that they struggled to understand the value of these practices. According to a national survey taken in 2004, even the use of radio exercises in schools is in decline, and it is increasingly becoming a marker of times past (Zenkoku Rajio Taiso Renmei 2004).

The generational gap regarding the value of such practices appeared clearly during a dinner that I attended with Japanese NGO workers in Burma/Myanmar. One of them, a woman in her thirties, had worked in OISCA a few years previous. She recounted that many of the other young, newly hired OISCA staff around her had objected to the disciplinary practices such as *tenko* (roll call), and many of them quit within a few weeks. Across the table, one of the elderly NGO workers in his seventies exclaimed that he felt no resistance (*teikō*) against *tenko* because this was a familiar practice for him. The other people around the table in their twenties and thirties confessed that they felt uncomfortable with the idea, suggesting that it was an anachronistic tradition, and, worse yet, perhaps a reminder of wartime Japan from which they wanted to distance themselves (personal communication, March 21, 2011). In this sense, the attempts to naturalize the morning routines as “techniques of the

body” (Mauss 1973) failed, as many younger generations could not shake off the allusions of the morning routines to a sense of pastness that included unsettling memories of imperial-militarist Japan. Disciplinary practices were far from being unconsciously embodied.

Ultimately, however, what I think is crucial here is that the awareness of the sense of pastness among Japanese aid actors, regardless of whether it was embraced or contested, served a key role in maintaining culturalist ideas of “Japan” as central to conceptualizations of development work in OISCA. This was the basis for the aftershock effects pulsating through OISCA’s activities. One of the unintended directions of such shock effects was the different engagements with OISCA’s modalities of aid work among “cultural others,” who responded to OISCA’s work but reformulated it based on their own interpretations. Although the emphasis in this chapter is on the politics of temporality among Japanese staff, I also suggest toward the end that there were also possibilities of future change, as Burmese staff at the OISCA Myanmar training center adapted OISCA’s modalities of aid work in their own ways.

### **Performing a Sense of Crisis**

The understanding of international aid work as a way to redo modernity differently in other countries through the revitalization of Japan’s past—aid work as a redemptive dream for Japan—was inspired by a sense of global and national crisis in OISCA. In short, I suggest that the sense of crisis and the allusions to pastness as “Japaneseness” were co-constitutive. I suggest that what is important to note is that “crisis” in OISCA was not so much a fact or event, as in “states of emergency” or “states of exception” (Agamben 2005; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Schmitt 2005[1922]), but a performative effect. Certainly, the language of environmental crisis, national crisis,



organizational crisis, and personal crisis that circulated in OISCA, for example, were not simply illusions. Nevertheless, what interests me is the labor that went into making the *sense* of crisis central to OISCA's mission and work. The noticeable characteristic of crisis in OISCA was that it helped justify a validation of "Japanese values" based on particular conceptualizations of the past.

Yet, there was the curious fact that despite the emphasis on crisis in OISCA's documents and archival material, I could not detect a sense of urgency in staff's daily activities. In particular, I was struck by the seeming gap between the messages focusing on global crisis on the OISCA-International listserv and the everyday life of staff and trainees. There was a Japanese man in his fifties, Shimada, who was in charge of the listserv at the Tokyo office. Shimada had in fact received a doctorate in sociology in the U.S., and for one reason or another—it was partly due to his father who was a major OISCA supporter—he had ended up working in OISCA. Although members of OISCA chapters around the world participated in the online discussions (in English), it was Shimada's job to propose topics of conversation. The truth was that few members replied to his emails, and the listserv was mostly dominated by Shimada's short essays on environmental and other crises. Here is an example of one of his emails from May 27, 2010 (the different fonts and letter sizes are from the original):

**[world-ml:00911] Today's Eco-Crisis: Scientists Predicted It by 1990**

Dear OISCA Friends,

Some of you seem unaware that **Ecological Crisis** facing us today has been warned by scientific communities for decades. So, this message quotes from two major 'Scientists' Warnings' made in the 20th century.

<< **1986 Report** by the **World Meteorological Organization** >>

"As a result of the increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases, it is now believed that in the first half of the next century, a rise of global mean temperature could occur which is greater than any in man's history."

[Originally quoted from the statement of the "International Conference on the Assessment of the Role of Carbon Dioxide and Other Greenhouse Gases on Climate Variations." ]

## << **1992 "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity"** >>

"No more than one or a few decades remain before the chance to avert the threats we now confront will be lost and the prospects for humanity immeasurably diminished... A great change in our stewardship of the Earth and life on it is required, if vast human misery is to be avoided and global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated."

The latter was signed by more than 1600 senior scientists from 71 countries. However, **David Suzuki** (perhaps the best known ethnically Japanese ecologist) reported the media reaction as follows:

"Nevertheless, when the 'World Scientists' Warning to Humanity' was released to the press, Canada's national newspaper and television network ignored it, while in the United States, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* rejected it as 'not newsworthy.'"

[David Suzuki with Amanda McConnell (1997) ***THE SACRED BALANCE: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature***, p. 5.]

Just for your reference. Have a nice day,

The following day, he sent the message below:

[world-ml:00912] **WHY Neglected Warnings? Psychological Shift Is Essential**

Dear OISCA Friends,

Did you read #911 (see below)?

But WHY has Humanity so badly failed to meet experts' wake-up calls made since the 1980s?

Today, many analysts attribute this striking failure to the wide-spread Resistance to Evolve Own Consciousness.

*Environment* (November/December, 2009), for instance, remarks this unfortunate disinclination to shift own mind-set as it introduces own "PSYCHOLOGY, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOR":

"Meeting existing and future climate change targets will require rapid social transformations that economics and technology alone can~~not~~ induce. We must also face up to the thorny question of human behavior. Of all of the human sciences, **psychology** has the most unfulfilled potential to contribute to understanding and informing behavior change in the environmental domain."

[Quoted from the content page of *Environment* (November/December 2009), Volume 51, Number 6; Emphasis mine.]

I should add that OISCA's own *Our Vision* (2007 & 2008) articulated this point earlier:

**"...the change of course requires not only technological 'easy-fixes,' but a profound evolution of worldviews on a planetary scale...."**

Hoping all of us have a Self-Evolving weekend,

In light of such emails filling my inbox, one day I approached Shimada to ask him why he focused so much on the message of crisis when the daily work of staff that I had observed did not seem to be driven by a similar sense of crisis. He told me that his responsibility was to convey Nakano's philosophy to the OISCA-International members around the world, and that one of the foundational missions of OISCA that he wanted to emphasize was "human survival in a time of crisis." He added that, in his view, his duty as a researcher was to cry out "fire!" when he saw one. In his usual roundabout way, he explained that, at the end of his life, he wanted to be able to tell God, "I did my best in my own way" (personal communication, May 26, 2010). In other words, he

suggested that sending alarms of global crisis with an eye toward worst-case-scenarios was part of his responsibility as a scholar and messenger of Nakano's teachings.

Clearly I had triggered something in Shimada. A couple of months later, he sent me the following email:

Before, you asked me "Why do you send out a sense of crisis (*kikikan*) in the W-ML [the OISCA-International listserv]?" The reasons are: (1) The trajectory of OISCA's establishment (The great sense of crisis about humanity) → Recognition of the need to revolutionize human systems → Establishment of (the precursor to) OISCA; (2) The destruction of the ecosystem that is speeding up at the beginning of the 21st century. [Personal communication, July 26, 2010]

That afternoon, he called me over to his desk in order to follow-up on this email and show me an OISCA document from 1961 that stressed the ecological and global crises facing humanity in the contemporary world. Driven by a sense that human beings were facing a moment of threat in the face of imminent nuclear disasters and rapid modernization, the document presented OISCA as the hope for saving humanity and building a better world for humans and all life on earth (OISCA 2007).<sup>34</sup> The document states in English:

We are extremely warned about the atomic destruction facing civilization and the future of this good earth of ours. We hereby unanimously declare that the only way to avoid the dreadful visitation of the nuclear weapons is to return to nature and to the Great Human Spirit which will enable men to stop immediately the terribly fatal conflicts and struggles between nations. [OISCA 1961: 13]

On one level, then, the initial mission of OISCA was to raise awareness about contemporary crises in the world and return to the essential Human Spirit inherent in all people as the solution.

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<sup>34</sup> OISCA staff and documents use the Japanese words *jinrui* or *ningen* to refer to ideas of humanity, and they use it interchangeably. I also see no need to distinguish between the two terms, and will treat them similarly in my writing.

Shimada had highlighted parts of the document in his hand and made extensive notes on the margins, pointing out that he had marked it up thinking that he would like to use it on the listserv one day. He explained that people tend to forget why they are doing something in the first place, including OISCA staff today, and so it was good to remind them by drawing on documents from the past, such as this one. "Reading such documents by Yonosuke Nakano that talk about the sense of crisis in 1961," he continued, "it kind of feels like a prophecy (*yogen*), doesn't it? OISCA could use this to advertise itself, to tell the world that OISCA was talking about the world's crisis before it became the popular discourse that it is today." He added that Nakano often used to say that "things had come apart" (*bara bara*), people separating "politics" from "environment," for example, and between the present, past, and future. "But in fact, everything is connected," he explained. In this sense, Shimada believed that the founder was someone who "had ideas that transcended temporal and spatial dimensions"—an ability that was necessary in the current world (personal communication, July 26, 2010).

A few days later, Shimada sent the following email to the listserv:

[world-ml:00964] Today's Rising Views = OISCA's Classic Views?

Dear OISCA Friends,

As repeatedly noted for you already, the points traditionally advanced by OISCA have been increasingly affirmed by the world's intellectuals in this century. Let me cite a passage from *ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS* (Spring 2010) just as one reflection of this welcome trend:

"The idea that Western culture -- or perhaps, by now, global culture -- needs a **new world view** seems indisputable in the context of the environmental disaster.... In whatever way we ultimately develop and articulate such a world view, its central tenets will likely include an understanding of the **Earth** as an **ecological system**, an explicit assumption that

**economic production** must fall under the standard of **ecological sustainability**, and perhaps the acceptance that **humans** are... '**plain citizens**' of the **biotic community**, not master of it."

[A critical review of *The Virtues of Ignorance: Complexity, Sustainability, and the Limits of Knowledge* (2008) eds. Bill Vitek & Wes Jackson, by Wayne Ouderkirk, *ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS* (Spring 2010), Volume 32, Number 1, pp. 107-110; p. 107, emphasis mine.]

OISCAns, are you wondering which aspects of the above correspond to OISCA's classic views? Let me quote from **President Yoshiko Nakano's** 1994 work, so that you can compare and find them out by yourself.

"Human Ethics ought to coincide with **Earth Ethics**. Unfortunately, our present human society has yet to see the connection. **Humanity** is still immature. We are not yet sufficiently conscious of the **greater laws of Nature**, and of the wider life cycles and of the **great unifying force of Life** that flows through all living things.... We must raise our vision beyond our own immediate environment and our own **material desires** to focus on the **greater whole** of which we are each but a **part**."

[Yoshiko Y. Nakano (1994) *MIRACULOUS LIFE CHAIN: The Essence of Evolution from the Universe to Mankind*; p. 90, emphasis mine.]

OISCAns, don't you see the similarities -- if not the essential sameness -- between the two passages above? Any comments?

For Shimada, stressing the sense of environmental and global crisis that was the initial message of Yonosuke Nakano, carried forth by his successor Yoshiko Nakano, was far from being irrelevant today. In fact, it was a testament to Nakano's predictive powers.

The notion of imminent crisis and Nakano's prophetic abilities were articulated also in reference to a sense of national crisis in Japan that was prevalent in the early years of OISCA's activities. I follow Carol Gluck's (1997) analysis to situate OISCA's rise in an era of "late modernity," marked by an "impulse to get beyond a bad modern past to a better modern future" (Gluck 1997: 10). What OISCA's work demonstrated

was that this impulse was not easily realized; a sense of loss and yearning for the past, as well as an uncertainty about the future also underlay the condition of late modernity. That is, if the “postwar” in Japan was predicated on a belief in a new beginning after 1945 and on the pursuit of the mirage of modernity, that modernity had already disappointed OISCA’s staff and supporters by the early 1970s. Throughout the 1960s, staff wrote in the OISCA magazine about the world’s expectations of Japan as a leader of development and modernization, echoing national-culturalist assertions of a “Japanese modernity” that would “overcome” the West (Arisaka 1996; Harootunian 1989, 2000). However, the pursuit of modernity also always harbors a sense of loss of things past. Accordingly, as the 1960s brought about rapid economic growth and urbanization, social alienation, and “Americanization” in lifestyle, a sense of cultural and social loss began to emerge in the discourses of OISCA staff and supporters. For example, in 1970, the LDP politician Naomi Nishimura lamented “the human alienation and disassociation borne out of the underdevelopment of spiritual culture” as a negative effect of Japan’s hasty process of modernization, and expressed support for OISCA in changing this tide (Nishimura 1970). As an organization of poor farmers, members of a new religion, and rural subjects with little education, OISCA embodied a sense of pastness linked with culturalist idealizations of Japanese traditional values, which appeared to correct the negative byproducts of modernity.

Nishimura’s view of OISCA at the time was in fact not misplaced, as Nakano and his followers had launched a nationalistic movement in the late 1960s that reflected such ideas. As the 1960s witnessed civil rights and student protests in Japan and elsewhere, Nakano and Ananaikyō members saw a major crisis in the negative effects of modernization, such as the disintegration of the family and traditional values. They called for a national reawakening in an effort called the People’s Movement to Pray for

the Peace of the Japanese (*Nihonjin No Wa Wo Negau Kokumin Undō*, hereafter “People’s Movement”). An undated OISCA pamphlet for this movement looks forward to the 1970s as a moment when “the spirit of Japan/harmony” (*wa no seishin*) should be taken up as a way to save Japan and the world from chaos and the violent conflicts at the time (Nihonjin No Wa Wo Negau Kokumin Undō Honbu 1970). The introductory statement in the document clarifies that this spirit is not about an “exclusionary form of nationalism” (*haitateki nashonarizumu*) that prays for Japanese prosperity, but a timeless and universal principle that aims to bring about and maintain peace in Asian nations and the rest of the world. The introduction further notes that this spirit is not a man-made philosophy but rather a principle derived from the Universe and Great Nature (*uchūdaishizen*) and adopted by the people of Asia—especially the Japanese—and ultimately by all of humanity. For Nakano and his followers, upholding the nation was linked with ideas of a life lived in accordance with the Great Spirit of the Universe, and Japan was to serve as the leading force of this global culturalist movement.

At the same time, however, Nakano and his followers also spoke about the national crisis facing Japan in terms of a sense of national loss, a perception of anxiety about the future of the country itself that was not based on the strength or centrality of contemporary Japan. Specifically, staff told me that Nakano foresaw the day when Japan would need the help of its Asian neighbors: that as a country with little natural resources of its own, Japan would need the assistance of other nations in the future (see OISCA 2011: 10). One staff in his 50s told me about his experiences working in Laos in the 1980s, around the time when Thailand and Laos were in open conflict regarding border disputes. At one point, the border closed and imports from Thailand ceased, and he saw how markets near the Laos OISCA training center gradually had less and less goods. He told me that this experience made him realize the kind of crisis that



Japan could face some day, since it relies heavily on imports (personal communication, March 8, 2010). Thus, this staff and others told me that helping Asian countries develop was also a form of mutual cooperation because some day Japan will need their help. In this sense, aid work for Nakano and older staff was a way to prepare for this eventual reversal of roles, a fact that a young staff member in her twenties, who was disturbed by its self-interested logic, explained to me (personal communication, January 28, 2010). This young employee has since quit.

In addition, this sense of national doom seemed to have been exacerbated in recent years, as several staff expressed to me a sense of disappointment about the current state of Japanese people. During an interview, I asked a senior staff member in his eighties what had changed the most in OISCA since he started working with Nakano in the 1960s. His reply surprised me: “It’s the Japanese who have changed the most; people now do not have the tenacity to struggle on the ground (*chi ni haitsukubatte*) and this is the biggest problem” (personal communication, March 9, 2010). He clarified that in the past, staff spent most of their time outside, speaking to members and recruiting new ones around the country without worrying about overtime pay or holidays. Today, staff work mostly in the office, facing their computers and shuffling documents. In his opinion, Japan had become too wealthy; people had stopped doing the things that they would do—the challenges and struggles that they would endure—if they were poor.

In another instance, Sakurai, the young director of the training center in Burma/Myanmar, told me his reasons for doing development work in Asian countries, whereas Japan no longer offered him hope. His home was a rural area in Western Japan and his parents farmed part-time. I asked him if he ever thinks of doing agricultural development and community revitalization work in his hometown, given

the problems of ageing rural populations and the fall of agricultural labor force in Japan. He thought about this for a while, and responded that although that is necessary, farming is dead in Japan today. He explained that there were no young people left in rural areas in Japan. He contrasted that with the situation in Burma/Myanmar, where he saw much more energy and potential left in rural communities. “There are babies popping out left and right even in the training center!” (personal communication, October 27, 2010). The sense of a loss of hope and doomed future is prevalent in contemporary Japan, as unemployment especially among youth continues to rise and the economy does not seem to be about to recover any time soon (Genda 2001, 2005; Miyazaki 2009; Yamada 2004). Against this background, what strikes me about OISCA’s activities is that international aid work seems to help divert Japanese people’s anxieties about the future of Japan by re-investing redemptive dreams in another country, toward other subjects outside of Japan’s national borders.

In this way, development aid was seen among OISCA’s Japanese staff and supporters as an opportunity to do “modernity” differently—a dream of a possible future in other countries using Japan’s past in order to “start over” the process of modernity differently elsewhere, without the social alienation, rejection of “traditional culture,” or disconnect from nature that plagued contemporary Japan. In this sense, this form of globality rested on the linear understanding of modernization that developing countries existed in a stage prior to Japan’s. Encouraging a different trajectory, OISCA’s senior Japanese staff hoped that developing countries would develop but not be doomed, and thus be able to help Japan materially and emotionally when the time came. Therefore, as much as it was based on an impulse to alleviate poverty in Asia, senior staff and supporters’ visions of development work also bore the tinge of a renewal of imperialist dreams, something that I consider haunts humanitarian

and development enterprises in general (see Barnett 2011). It was an attempt to transform the loss of hope into a dream of self-regeneration as a global player in another form, a form of international aid as a redemptive dream. This was not a project to return to an imperial golden age, but hopelessness and the subsequent turn to seek a form of renewal in other countries was a move that could easily evoke a post-imperial, if not imperialist, dream.

### **“This is Not Religion”**

The construction of a sense of global and national crisis, and the subsequent articulation of redemptive dreams, were conditioned by OISCA’s background as a religiously-based organization. In fact, it was significant that it derived from a Shinto-based religious group. I was always surprised when Japanese staff members who did not belong to Ananaikyō told me that they did not know about OISCA’s religious roots and affiliations before joining, a confession of shock that I heard many times. OISCA’s website clearly shows that the organization sprung from what it calls the Spiritual and Cultural International Conferences (*seishin bunka kokusai kaigi*), organized by Yonosuke Nakano throughout the 1950s. A quick search online and in reference books would reveal that Nakano (1887-1974) was an owner of a small business in Shizuoka with an elementary school education who turned to a new religion, Ōmoto, in his middle age. Subsequently, he studied several of Ōmoto’s associated traditions, such as “spirit studies” (*reigaku*), which included mystical practices such as spirit possession. As Nancy Stalker (2008) describes, although Ōmoto shared many of the basic worldviews, forms of worship, and mythological elements of the various traditions labeled as Shinto (shrine Shinto, sect Shinto, heterodox Shinto), its “occult spiritualist practices” threatened the modernizing, rational Japanese state and was thus violently suppressed

several times (Stalker 2008: 76). Nakano was jailed in the 1930s as part of this crackdown.

In 1949, he officially founded his own religion, Ananaikyō. People joined from all over Japan, mostly rural citizens, and regional temples or branches were established in subsequent years. After founding Ananaikyō, Nakano moved his activities from Shizuoka to Tokyo and began to organize international peace conferences with religious leaders from other countries. According to an Ananaikyō official, Nakano soon realized that religious leaders would not be enough to bring about peace in the world because they tended to fight among themselves (personal communication, February 8, 2010). In 1961, Nakano invited a wider group of participants from around the world and organized the Congress for Cultivating Universal Human Spirit, co-sponsored by the leading religious journal in Kyoto, *Chūgai Nippō*.

The congress aimed to “transcend religion” and create a global realization that human beings are rooted in the Great Spirit of the Universe (*uchū daiseishin*). The 460 participants around the world who gathered in Japan adopted a resolution to advance “the Universal Human Spirit” (*jinrui seishin*). The English-language summary of the Congress explains the “Human Spirit” in this way:

The Human Spirit is the latent potential force with vital processes unifying mankind, manifesting itself through the human mind and expressing itself through human actions. It is inherent in all human beings and transcends time, space and worldly limitations and is capable of being developed so as to lead to universal peace, love and brotherhood. [OISCA 1961: 2]

A second congress was held later that year in 1961, and the precursor to OISCA, the International Organization for Cultivating Human Spirit (IOCHS) was established.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> During the time of these Congresses, there was enthusiasm among other new religions in Japan to organize international peace conferences. As a result of an international conference, in

During a Congress meeting in 1965, representatives from India, Pakistan, and the Philippines requested technical assistance in agriculture from IOCHS in order to relieve their food shortage crisis at the time (Aizawa 2002). IOCHS sent a team to survey the situation in these countries, and concluded that “the development of industry based on our strong spiritual solidarity is necessary in order to improve people’s standards of living” (OISCA International 1966: 24). I should note that when OISCA used the term “industry,” it did not refer to factories and the industrial sector. Nakano taught that the Great Spirit of the Universe gives birth to various activities on this earth, and as such, productive activities that follow this Great Spirit were defined as “spiritual industries” (*seishin sangyō*) (Yonosuke Nakano 1963: 7-8). Therefore, the “development of industry” for OISCA meant the development of activities in accordance with the laws of nature that reflect the Great Spirit of the Universe, agriculture being the most important of these industries. The Ananaikyō members who were professional farmers and were sent to India, Pakistan, and the Philippines thus spent decades overseas in an effort to realize this vision of the Great Human Spirit by working on the most important spiritual industry of agriculture.

When these agricultural aid activities began in 1965, the organization was renamed the Organization for Industrial, Spiritual and Cultural Advancement (OISCA),

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1962 the Japan Religions Peace Committee was established (Nihon Shūkyōsha Heiwa Kyōgikai (Japan Religions Peace Committee) 1968: 193). The Committee’s declaration of establishment began with a regret and apology from religious groups for having colluded with Japan’s military aggression into Asia during the Second World War, and its principles of world peace came to be based on this stance (Ibid: 194). In 1970, one of the largest and most prominent new religions, Risshō Kōseikai, also organized the World Conference on Religions for Peace (WCRP), which has grown to become an international coalition with headquarters in New York and consultative status with UN agencies. While these international religious movements were led mainly by traditional religions and new religious groups in the Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan (*Shinshūren*), Ananaikyō—and evidently OISCA—was not part of this community. I was never able to find out why Ananaikyō is not a member of Shinshūren today, and there is no space here to discuss it thoroughly, but I can assume that it was due to differing political positions, such as regarding the Yasukuni Shrine debates.

initially with an emphasis on increasing food production capabilities in the face of the food shortage crises in Asian countries. As a report from one of the men in the first projects in India explains, Nakano's status as a religious leader and organizer of the international conferences connected OISCA staff to prominent figures in India, facilitating their first activities (Aizawa 1966). The part of the organization that conducts development projects became OISCA, and the worldwide network of people created through the international Congresses became OISCA-International. As of 2012, there are 31 chapters affiliated with OISCA International, which conduct various environmental and other activities independent of the Tokyo office, and OISCA the NGO conducts over fifty projects—training programs, reforestation activities, and other environmental projects—in seventeen countries under the management of the Tokyo headquarters.

In recent years, there has been a growth in studies of religiously-based or “faith-based” aid organizations and movements (Bornstein 2005; Ferris 2011; Hefferan and Fogarty 2010; Occhipinti 2005). However, OISCA seems to differ from such cases, such as World Vision, which are explicit about their religious—mainly Christian—philosophies and objectives. In OISCA, the organization's religious background, and that of most of the senior Japanese staff who were Ananaikyō members, could only appear in other ways, if at all. Despite the fact that politicians supported OISCA because of Nakano's status as a religious leader, and there continued to be a flow of personnel, philosophy, and resources between Ananaikyō and OISCA, staff tended to downplay the NGO's connection to Ananaikyō. Even those senior staff members who belonged to Ananaikyō and spoke of gods (*kami*) or religious faith (*shinkō*) during interviews with me, avoided such topics in front of non-Ananaikyō staff and others. When I would deviously bring up Ananaikyō openly in the Tokyo office, they usually

dropped their voices and referred to it only indirectly as “that place (*asoko*)” or “that thing (*are*).”

One reason for this was legal: whereas Ananaikyō is registered as a religious organization, OISCA is registered as an incorporated foundation (*zaidan hōjin*), and has been since 1969. According to a senior OISCA staff, the establishment of OISCA as an incorporated foundation was a strategic move by Nakano in order to receive government funds, since religious organizations are excluded from such schemes (personal communication, April 15, 2010). Thus, OISCA staff had to ensure that their organization did not appear as a religious organization for financial and legal purposes.

Furthermore, OISCA staff were aware that new religions, especially since the Aum Shinrikyō terrorist subway attack in 1995, were seen as a threat to modernization and rationality in contemporary Japan (Hardacre 2003). One OISCA staff and Ananaikyō member acknowledged that the staff often felt a kind of prejudice from Japanese people outside the organization because of OISCA’s religious background (personal communication, November 30, 2009). I found that this fear was not unfounded: an OISCA supporter told me that although he had backed OISCA’s activities for years, he thought that it was “a suspicious organization (*ayashii dantai*)” because of the “hints of religion (*shūkyō no iro*)” that appeared in its activities from time to time (personal communication, August 3, 2011). In the face of such negative public reactions to OISCA’s roots in a new religion, Japanese staff dissimulated the influence of Nakano’s teachings as “Japanese values” of Shinto.

An ethnographic moment will help illustrate the point. One day in the spring of 2010, the elderly OISCA staff who had patiently explained to me the organization’s political relationships, Shiraki, offered to introduce me to the current president of OISCA Diet League, Kōichi Tani. After a few introductory exchanges, I asked him why

he thought that in a postwar environment where “religion” was seen with suspicion, politicians would have supported Yonosuke Nakano, a religious leader, and his organization, OISCA. He paused. “The founder, Nakano something, he was a religious leader? I wasn’t aware of that,” he remarked. Shiraki intervened and explained that Nakano was the founder of a Shinto-based religion, and as a follower of Shinto, he also studied Nativism (*kokugaku*). Nativism was a strand of scholarship that emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries that strove to “restore” an idealized form of “Japaneseness,” which later became a basis for nationalistic ideologies centered around the emperor in the 20th century (Hardacre 1989). Nativism promoted the study of Shinto and Japanese ancient literature as a way to rediscover “Japanese” emotions and spiritual qualities. In fact, some scholars state that it was Nativism that established Shinto as a unified, national religion, rather than the other way around (T. Kuroda 1993).

Tani seized on the offer to refract the issue of religion, and nodded with approval. “If he was a Nativist scholar, politicians must not have felt any sense of discomfort because the LDP is for upholding Japanese traditions,” he stated. He then made sure I had not misunderstood, and remarked that if Nakano had shown his religiosity openly, OISCA would probably not have succeeded as much as it had. “Although,” he backtracked rather vaguely, “even if Yonosuke Nakano had shown more of his colors as a Shinto leader, it would have been an obvious thing for the Japanese people and LDP to support since Shinto is Japanese culture” (personal communication, February 15, 2010). Faced with the question of religion, Shiraki had first identified Ananaikyō with Shinto, and then Yonosuke Nakano and Shinto with Nativism, displacing the topic of religion into one of culture, a move that the LDP politician welcomed readily.



This reorientation of Ananaikyō/Shinto-as-religion into Ananaikyō/Shinto-as-culture also emerged amongst OISCA staff in other occasions, and it is in fact a move found widely within Japanese society. A number of scholars have challenged the assumptions of secularity in modernity in Japan and elsewhere, arguing that the categories “religion” and “secularity” are interrelated European-derived constructions embedded in specific political and historical contexts, underwriting projects of modernity around the world, even though such distinctions have never been actualized in reality (Asad 2003; Calhoun et al. 2011; Taylor 2007; Fitzgerald 2003; cf. Reader 2005). In the case of Shinto in Japan, Toshio Kuroda (1993) argues that it was only with the rise of modern nationalism by Nativism in the 18th century that Shinto was constructed as Japan’s indigenous religion from time immemorial. Then, from the mid-19th century to the end of the Second World War, state actors responded to the Western-influenced modern demands to distinguish between “religion” and “secularity” by formulating Shinto as “nonreligion” and, ultimately, as the source of national morality in the ideology of State Shinto (Hardacre 1989; Isomae 2007).

In this sense, it should be pointed out that the emergence of Shinto as “nonreligion” was not the same as histories of secularization and secularism in Europe or other monotheistic contexts in that it was not a system that separated “religion” from other social domains such as the state, or privatized religion, or claimed the dissipation of religion with modernization (Casanova 1994; see also Cannell 2010). But neither was it an argument for “religion” as such to have a public role. As with Hinduism in colonial and post-colonial India, it was a stance that interpreted Shinto as specifically “nonreligion,” neither religion nor secularity but a transcendental moral category (Chatterjee 1993; Hansen 1999). It was in this environment that new religions with mystical practices such as Ōmoto, seen squarely in the category of “religion” (*shūkyō*) or

worse yet as “superstition” (*meishin*), threatened state interpretations of a “nonreligious” Shinto.

In this sense, OISCA staff’s reactions, especially those of Ananaikyō members, seemed to rely on this historical conceptualization of Shinto as “nonreligion.” In an effort to distance OISCA from the “religious” and “superstitious” elements of Ananaikyō—such as mediated spirit possession (*chinkon kishin*)—senior Ananaikyō-OISCA staff often explained to me that the influence Ananaikyō in OISCA was ultimately about Japanese traditions embodied in Shinto. For example, when I asked a senior Ananaikyō-OISCA staff, Kimura, what the impact of Ananaikyō was on OISCA’s activities, he replied:

It is not so much about Ananaikyō but about Shinto, and about valuing Japanese traditions. When one says “religion,” you might think of something like Sōka Gakkai [one of the largest new religions in Japan], but that’s not our case. Shinto envelops many religions... OISCA was made because we needed something that transcends religion. In the international conferences, religious leaders fought with each other all the time, and so we proposed Shinto—we proposed agriculture and removed the barrier of religion... That is, a form of development that is in harmony with nature, a sustainable form of development. [Personal communication, November 30, 2009]

Kimura thus articulated Ananaikyō’s influence on OISCA as “traditional Japanese values,” something that transcended “religion.” The truth was that, although the categories of religion and secularity have been challenged in Japan and elsewhere, they were nonetheless concepts that demanded responses from OISCA staff. In other words, even if secularity might be a fiction that many scholars are currently debunking, OISCA’s Japanese staff engaged with the distinctions of religion and secularity in order to assert that their work was nonreligion, that is, about Japanese traditions that transcended the very categories of religion and secularity. The historically conditioned responses of nonreligion regarding Shinto, moreover, allowed staff members to assert

linkages between “Japaneseness” and spiritual universalism, the past and hopes of a universal future. What was ironic was that “secular” modernity’s demands to separate “religious” realms from other social spheres was what instigated OISCA’s senior Ananaikyō staff to make claims of “nonreligion” as arguments for a culturalist pastness that needed to be upheld in OISCA’s international aid activities.

### **The Cultural Other as Future**

The stance of Shinto-as-culture, and particularly the belief in Shinto as a transcendental system, evoked uneasy memories of imperialist Japan. Although I contend that OISCA’s activities were not just attempts to reproduce wartime Japanese aspirations because of the prevailing sense of doom and loss in Japan itself, the allusions to imperial Japan in the references to pastness were difficult to shake off. In the following sections I describe how the understanding of international aid work as a redemptive dream for Japan among OISCA’s Japanese staff and supporters was formulated in two ways. First is the conceptualization of the cultural other—the trainees and local staff—as vehicles for future renewal. This included a rearticulation of Japanese veterans’ memories of the war as incentives to support OISCA’s aid work. The second way in which Japanese pastness used in other countries became a form of redemptive dream, as I explain in the next section, was through the concept of *furusato-zukuri* (“making a home-place”).

It is important to note that the evocations of a Japanese past depended on the trainings being conducted for young people from Asia-Pacific countries. In an interview with an OISCA employee, an 81-year-old former deputy chief cabinet secretary and long-time OISCA supporter stated that “Japanese values” could contribute to world peace and development. At the same time, he acknowledged that

countries around the world today look to Japan as a “teacher by negative example” (*hanmen kyōshi*). That is, Japan had lost its traditional values in the rapid quest for modernity, and this was something to regret. He explained that OISCA had stood up against this trend, valuing discipline and moral education (*dōtoku kyōiku*) in the strict environment of its training for youth from the Asia-Pacific (Kan 2003). Thus, the disciplinary practices used on cultural others in OISCA served as a trigger to simultaneously acknowledge the loss of Japanese traditional values and reinvest notions of Japan’s past as a resource for the future in Japan and the rest of the world.

Thus, working upon cultural others in the training courses produced a hope for redoing Japan’s recent history. When I visited one of the training centers in Japan, a staff member in his forties explained to me the meaning of the morning routines:

You must feel uncomfortable (*iwakan*) [seeing these morning routines]; I felt it too at first... But most of the countries represented here are former colonies [of the West], and so their flags have great meaning for the trainees [as symbols of independence]. We Japanese tend to be out of touch [*utoi*] about these things, but for most people in the world, paying respect to the flag is taken for granted. Japanese people today have a mentality of war defeat [*haisen shikō*] and a habit of belittling our own country. There is probably a need to revise our history textbooks and acknowledge that Japan has not only done bad things, as we have been told. Japanese people also did good things in the world. [Personal communication, January 27, 2010]

If he meant to assuage my discomfort, it only grew with his explanation, as he connected the morning routines to a selective erasure of wartime history envisioned through the bodily practices demanded from non-Japanese trainees. Granted, most of the trainees themselves told me that they found value in paying respect to their own flags and other countries’ flags. However, this staff member’s account indicated that he saw cultural others, specifically from the Asia-Pacific, as a form of reset button for Japan. What he expressed was a dream of repetition, not in the sense of “doing again,”

but a re-doing in a spirit of a second chance in a particular politics of remembrance and forgetting, interpolated through relations with those conceived to be cultural others.

In one instance, an employee whose family belonged to Ananaikyō told me that for many of the first OISCA men who went to India and the Philippines in the 1960s (all OISCA staff in the first few decades were men), the memories of the war were what gave meaning to their work. He told me that their voyage with OISCA to former battlefields was conceived as a way to venerate the spirits of their comrades and others—he did not specify if these “others” meant local people—who perished there during the war, and a continuation of the suspended work of making a universal family (personal communication, March 19, 2010). Therefore, the return to places of loss by Japanese staff was propelled by a hope that they could reorient the gap between aspirations toward a universal family and the reality of brutality in the war. It was as if they saw their work as a dream of prewar Pan-Asianism before it was transformed into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere by nationalist-militarist forces (Saaler 2007). With this thinking, senior employees’ aspirations for a second chance were not aimed at reenacting the past, but rather, it was an effort to forget selectively and to “start over.” This was indeed also an attempt to forget that prewar visions of universalism could not be separated from the subsequent Japanese imperialist nationalism and its atrocities against people around the Asia-Pacific (cf. Arisaka 1997).

In a similar vein, a number of committed OISCA supporters donated to the organization based on memories of the Second World War. One day in April 2010, I spoke with an elderly Japanese man who for years had donated money to the projects in Burma/Myanmar, a man whom I call Mitsui. This astonishingly energetic 90-year-old man had been donating to this project since it began in 1996 and had even created the Nagano Myanmar Association in his hometown to support OISCA’s activities there. He

happened to be in Tokyo for an annual gathering with his comrades from the Second World War, and he agreed to meet with me before returning to his hometown. As we sat in a room at the OISCA office, Mitsui recounted with great care the trajectory of his life, from the days of growing up in a poor farming family to becoming an instruction officer in the army during the war, and his passion for volunteer work after the war. He had even prepared copies of handwritten records about his life and his service in the war. I asked him why he was so invested in the projects in Burma/Myanmar. “220,000 Japanese soldiers died there,” he replied. “That means that most of the soldiers who were sent there died”. I asked him why he was so committed to volunteer work. He answered that he was able to come back from four years in battlefields, while so many others died. His work now was to serve others (*hōshi*), in gratitude (personal communication, April 11, 2010).

Later, an OISCA staff member shared with me a story about Mitsui. Some Burmese villagers near OISCA’s project site found a blood-stained Japanese flag with names written on it, and they brought it to the OISCA office. The project director at the time, Kawaguchi, sent it to Mitsui in Japan, thinking that he might be able to use his war veterans’ network to identify to whom it may have belonged. When Mitsui received the flag, he saw on it the name of one of his students from the army. It had belonged to a young man whom he taught, who died in Burma/Myanmar.

Support for the OISCA project in Burma/Myanmar from individual Japanese donors who had lost someone in the war was not unique. Since the project began, former Japanese soldiers who spent harrowing years in Burma/Myanmar, or the children and grandchildren of Japanese soldiers died there, have been donating money, mainly to fund the construction of elementary schools. Although such donations from veterans and their families also existed in the other overseas projects that were former

battle sites, OISCA staff told me that it seemed more prevalent in the Myanmar project, perhaps due to the fact that it was one of the most traumatic battles that left a devastating number of Japanese soldiers dead. Popular depictions of Japanese experiences of war in Burma/Myanmar often portray it as particularly painful, representative of the ways that the imperialist military regime coerced Japanese citizens to invest in a meaningless and hopeless war (see for example NHK 1995).

Sakurai, the current director of the Myanmar project, told me about a woman who often came to the Myanmar training center on the periodic visits with the Nagano Myanmar Association. She had lost her father in Burma/Myanmar during the war. Her son, a man in his thirties, had apparently always shown hesitancy, if not indifference, to these trips, but one time he decided to accompany his mother. According to Sakurai, when this young man set foot in the OISCA training center, not far from where his grandfather had probably died, he burst into tears. Sakurai explained that such anecdotes might not seem very important to people in the Tokyo office, but that they were extremely moving when you saw them actually unfold in the field (personal communication, August 29, 2010).

Scholars have pointed out that postwar Japan is constituted in splinters between remembering and forgetting, yearning to return and start anew. On the one hand, unlike a nostalgic obsession with return, there has been a certain dread of the reappearance of a horrifying past in postwar Japan, as in the case of Germany (Boyer 2006). On the other hand, the dropping of the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the American Occupation, also respectively created screens by which history came to be narrated through a politics that remembered certain things and forgot others (Yoneyama 1999; cf. Battaglia 1993). OISCA staff and supporters of different generations oscillated between the yearning for a selectively remembered lost

past and the knowledge that it could not be, or should not be, a point of return. And this negotiation over the past happened through the bodily disciplinary practices of non-Japanese trainees.

### **Return as Renewal**

The second area where notions of the past in service of the future appeared in OISCA was in its revised mission statement in 2000: *furusato-zukuri* (“making a home-place”). Defined as “hometown” or “home-place,” *furusato* is a term that evokes a place where people and nature coexist in harmony, and it is often marked by a sense of nostalgia (imagine a small Japanese village nestled between lush mountains, surrounded by rice paddies). The English translation of *furusato-zukuri* was something with which Japanese staff continued to struggle, however. Even in the fall of 2011, staff e-mailed me to ask if I could think of good translations for *furusato-zukuri* as a slogan in English. I provisionally use “making a home-place” in the context of this chapter. OISCA’s publications explain that the *furusato* it envisions is a sustainable world *in the future* where humans and all life forms on earth coexist, maintaining a balance (OISCA 2002b). At the same time, *furusato* was imagined in visions of pastness. Specifically, Japanese staff saw other countries as opportunities for renewing the values of *furusato*—in other words, as occasions for return as renewal, for Japanese imaginations of the past as inspirations for redemptive dreams. In an OISCA magazine article from 1976, the author (a staff member) begins with a sense of crisis: that with rapid economic growth and the mechanization of agriculture, *furusato* was lost in Japan. The author writes:

I do not intend to disparage mechanization or reject modernization, but we [Japanese] have gradually lost Japan’s farming villages as the *furusato* of the heart... But fortunately the environment of *furusato* remains in developing countries, and so we must take care of this. OISCA’s development work is a “*furusato* movement” in developing countries.



[OISCA 1976: 43]

Perceived to be in a moment before the ravages of modernization, developing countries were construed as hopeful sites of aid intervention through which the sense of loss of *furusato* could be replaced with a possibility of redoing modernity differently. If developing countries could achieve a different kind of modernity from Japan's, the thinking went, their future would not be doomed and they would be able to come to Japan's rescue when the need arose.

Yoshiko Nakano, the successor to Yonosuke Nakano, wrote that OISCA's work of *furusato-zukuri* was based on the principle of "staying close to the soil" (*tsuchi kara hanarenai*) (Yoshiko Nakano 2002: 172). Bypassing the fact that in the contemporary world many people are mobile and might not have a stable sense of "home," Yoshiko Nakano states:

People need to develop genuine love of home with a true attachment to their own culture and their "soil." If they think about the environment and how to cope with the problems of environmental destruction, they may realize that their love of home can grow into love of Mother Earth. [Yoshiko Nakano 2001: 19]

Yoshiko Nakano explains that OISCA's commitment to agricultural and community development work based on this love of home encourages all people around the world to treasure the soil from which they are born and to which they will return (Yoshiko Nakano 2002: 27; see also Yonosuke Nakano 1963). What is striking about Yoshiko Nakano's understanding of a universal future through this notion of *furusato-zukuri* is this emphasis on return. Marilyn Ivy (1995) has poignantly argued that the concept of *furusato* involves a longing to return to a point of origin, to an authentic "Japan" that had never been present in the first place. She writes that "although we recognize the absence of the originary home, 'Japan,' we simultaneously disavow that absence

through the substitute presence of '*furusato*,'" a substitution that always still leaves a gnawing sense of absence at its core (Ivy 1995: 11). As scholars have also argued about the concept of *furusato* in contemporary art in Japan, the desire for a home and the terror of our actual origin, which we can never grasp, frame the conceptual movement of *furusato* (Moriyama 2012[1976]; Sas 2011). Thus, while the disciplinary practices evoked a Japan of times past, the idea that these activities were working toward the creation of and return to *furusato* masked, incompletely, the terror of the absence of an originary place (see also Morris 2000).

However, when the staff actually tried to articulate *furusato-zukuri* as a principle of globality and the future in their work, the national-cultural point of origin appeared as a subject of contestation. If *furusato* in Yoshiko Nakano's conceptualization resonated with the analyses of Ivy and others in that the realization of loss is forestalled and a repressed past returns inadvertently, the ways in which *furusato* emerged in OISCA's activities began with an explicit awareness of loss. Furthermore, the staff's reference to the past was not seen as an uncanny return, but, rather, quite consciously contested.

One ethnographic instance will illustrate what was at stake. Early in my fieldwork, one of the mid-level employees in the Tokyo headquarters, Ban, explained to me that *furusato* was an important concept in OISCA. He was not sure how the idea came to be taken up as a vision for the organization, but it was now the staff's responsibility to materialize it (*gutaika*) in OISCA's activities (personal communication, October 9, 2009). To this end, in January 2010, he organized a meeting in Tokyo with staff from the overseas project department in order to begin defining *furusato-zukuri*. He had asked my advice about its definition in the past, thinking that perhaps anthropology had something to say about it, and so he invited me to join the meeting.



Figure 12: Tokyo headquarters office.

From the moment that we sat down, there was uncertainty as to how to approach the idea of *furusato*. Ban's first question was how to proceed with the meeting. One of the young staffers in his thirties, Kobayashi, expressed his concern that regardless of what was decided at the meeting, it was vital to examine how the practices already taking place in the field would connect with our abstract understandings of *furusato*. Ban agreed, but he explained that the first step needed to be a formulation of a theory of *furusato* from headquarters. Kobayashi did not seem convinced, and stressed that the definition could perhaps only come after surveying the project activities.

The disagreement went on for a while until other participants intervened and managed to shelve the issue for the moment. Everyone agreed that it was important to begin by brainstorming what came to mind when we thought of *furusato*. We spent about ten minutes writing down key words on Post-it notes, and went around

presenting them on the board at the front of the room. Some of the terms that came up were: a farming village; nature; a place where traditional culture is alive; a place of balance between material objects, matters of the spirit, and culture; a place where people can feel safe and at home; a place of healing; and a place with rich human relationships.

Looking at the board, one of the participants, a former official from a governmental aid agency and external advisor to OISCA who also volunteered in the Tokyo office once a week, commented that in some ways it seemed that our ideas of *furusato* derived from our frustrations and anxieties about daily life. He cautioned that *furusato-zukuri* in OISCA should not be about creating a utopia in this sense, excluding current realities for the sake of an ideal. He continued that it should be an effort to try to live within existing conditions, and utilize existing resources.

After a while, one of the young attendees ventured that, in all honesty, the idea of *furusato* did not quite resonate with her. Kobayashi agreed, and the earlier disagreement flared up again. Kobayashi asked: “Are we trying to create whatever headquarters thinks is *furusato*? Shouldn’t our task be to create a link between the idea of *furusato* and the reforestation and training projects that are already happening in our project sites?” He was concerned about the fact that headquarters was going to invent a concept of *furusato* and impose it on the overseas projects. Ban replied that, indeed, headquarters had to first develop a definition in order to be able to send the idea to the overseas projects, and then ask for their feedback with examples from the field.

It seemed to me that this disagreement between theory and practice, concepts and reality, deductive and inductive reasoning was an effect of the inherent elusiveness of *furusato*, in which we could not distinguish between its inception and endpoint. *Furusato-zukuri* had multiple directionalities. On the one hand, as the brainstorming

session revealed, *furusato* evoked certain notions of what staff felt were lost in modern Japan, and desired from the past. On the other hand, the disagreements indicated that if *furusato* was going to be made through development work, it could not only be about realizing these objects of desire from the past; differences with the past needed to be pursued. In fact, what the disagreements showed was that everyone agreed that *furusato* in the idealized Japanese form no longer existed, and the task was to figure out how to materialize the concept in the world today in new ways in order to make it operational in aid work. As Jennifer Robertson (1999) has argued in her analysis of *furusato-zukuri*, “the conception of eternal recurrence (tradition) and the belief in progress (internationalization) are complementary if refractive” (115).

Ultimately, the unexamined assumption in this problematization was that the elements of *furusato* are universal and that they exist in developing countries today—and that it was neither irrelevant nor too late to recuperate in those places. Cultural others in developing countries were thus again conceived as sites of intervention where the Japanese aid actor could “jump” to a moment in “the past” along the assumed trajectory of modernity, and thereby work out the kinks between past and future in the dream of starting over. It never occurred to anyone at the meeting that the vision of *furusato* might be a particularly Japanese imagination.

### **Neither Past nor Lost: “This is Burma/Myanmar”**

I argue that the foregoing tensions among Japanese staff over the meanings and articulations of the past ultimately kept ideas of Japan and its historical or culturally imagined past intact as the terms of discussion. A more critical challenge appeared, I propose, from local staff, such as those at the Myanmar training center who adopted terms such as *furusato* but divorced it from references to pastness. In short, Burmese

staff defined *furusato* as a result of what their work with OISCA had brought to the present and promised for the future. One of the Burmese employees at the OISCA Myanmar project, Ko Thein, a man in his thirties who had been a trainee at the OISCA Myanmar training center in the late 1990s, and also trained in Japan several times, admitted to me that, at first, when he went to OISCA's Myanmar training center as a trainee, he wanted to go home. As a boy in his late teens, he had never lived away from his parents. "But," he told me in Japanese, "after a few months I got used to it, and now it's like my *furusato*" (personal communication, September 14, 2010). He married another trainee, and they were raising a son at the training center. At a later date, when I asked him about his hopes for the future, he replied that he wanted the Myanmar training center to exist for many years, for hundreds of years, so that they could continue to help people in the surrounding villages (personal communication, October 9, 2010). He stated that in order to achieve that, they needed good staff members who worked hard and cared for others. Otherwise, he cautioned, the center would fail, like parents whose property is divided up when they die.

Another senior Burmese aid worker, Ko Maung, told me that the idea of *furusato* that was at the training center was the result of the Burmese staff's own hard work. He was one of the first trainees in the Myanmar training center, and told me that when he first arrived to Yesagyo, there was nothing there. It is located in the central Dry Zone of Burma/Myanmar, which is an arid region, but the current training center stands out with its trees and lush rice paddies. Ko Maung pointed to a tree next to the office building, explaining that it was, when he started, the only tree at the time.

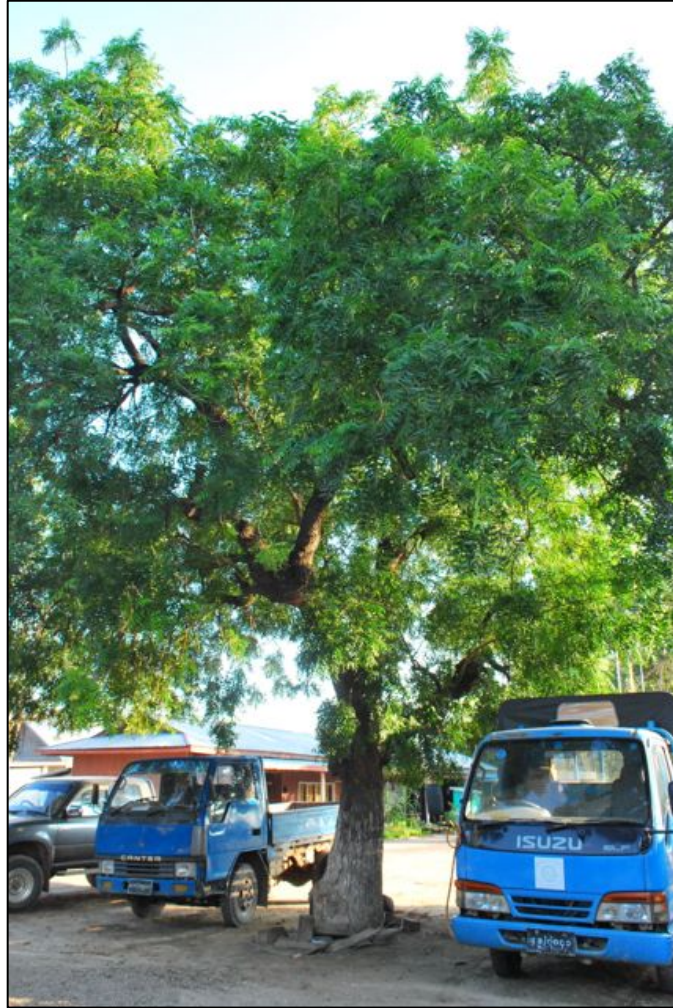


Figure 13: The original tree at the Myanmar training center, according to Ko Maung.

He told me that he and his fellow trainees, with the Japanese staff, had built the training center and its environment from scratch to what it is today (personal communication, October 2, 2010). The past was not lost but a time of “nothing,” and *furusato* in his opinion was not what was “no longer,” but, rather, what had “become.” At the same time, this *furusato* was not the endpoint. Ko Maung told me that he realized early on that the Japanese staff would eventually return to Japan and it was the Burmese people who would stay, and in that sense, it was up to them whether the training center would

continue. This “home” was a fruit of their efforts, but there was always the threat of it becoming “no longer” in the future.

If understandings of development aid among the Japanese staff and supporters emerged from efforts to recast the “no-longer,” development work in the minds of the Burmese staff was conceptualized in the *anticipation* of the no-longer. In another instance, a female Burmese staff member, Ma Phy, told me that she worried that Burmese culture might be lost in the process of development. She gave the example that in Burma/Myanmar, women and men do not live together before marriage, and she worried that such values would not be protected. She had witnessed this in Japan, where traditional values had eroded, and worried that the same might happen in her country (personal communication, October 29, 2010). What I found intriguing in this perspective was that she had indeed taken note of the Japanese sense of loss of past “Japanese values,” but that this sense was translated into a prospect of loss in the future in her own country. In fact, this future was a near future, since staff (and others) often commented on how things were quickly changing in Burma/Myanmar with the increase of satellite television, cell phones, and other technology, and the perceived accompanying decline of traditional values and morality.

However, this was not a foreclosed view like Nakano’s prophesied future doom of Japan. On the contrary, it could be said that the creation of the training center as one’s *furusato*, not as a harking back to something in the past but as a place that could be lost without proper care, led Burmese staff toward an open and uncertain future. For the Burmese staff who ran the training center, development was not something that was going to happen elsewhere. They had to take the conditions of the present and contextual place into account. In many ways this was a casting of their development work as a task of *preparing* for the future in their own national-cultural terms. As I



illustrate in subsequent chapters, this was, in fact, an effort that entangled Japanese staff and supporters as well, as the contextual conditions and social relations in the daily life of development work shaped how they could configure and transform the past into the future. Aid work as preparations for the future, in practice, complicated the shift from loss to hope, as different Japanese and Burmese staff set their concerns over the past, future, and the present against each other. And there was no guarantee that this process would end with Burmese people helping Japan when the time foretold by Nakano arrived. But there was also no way to tell if the anticipation of loss framed by national-cultural concerns would one day become a sense of loss of the past as Burma/Myanmar continued to change, and thus lead to a replication of OISCA's dreams of redemption in the Burmese context. After all, preparing for the future and the sense of national decay were not antithetical to each other.

## **Conclusion**

From Mitsui who found himself holding the blood-stained flag, to the definition of *furusato-zukuri*, I have traced how various notions of past loss were mobilized by OISCA's Japanese staff in order to transform the past into a resource for the future—not as a movement of return but rather as an expectation of a redemptive dream of Japan's renewal. At the height of Japan's economic growth, OISCA's senior Japanese staff and supporters raised alarm at the loss of Japan's past traditions and sociality. Anticipating a collapse of Japan's ability to sustain itself, Nakano and his followers embarked on development activities around the world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific, that would not only bring progress to those countries, but also start “modernity” over in another way and prepare for the day when Japan would need assistance from neighboring countries. As one of the earliest international aid NGOs in Japan that enjoyed the

support of powerful political actors, OISCA's work exemplifies the ways that aid work can become a way to activate dreams of national and global redemption that have tinges of imperialist aspirations, in a context where a sense of national crisis prevails—a specter that I suggest is appearing in post-disaster Japan after 2011 as well. OISCA's practices indicated that the daily task of using the sense of the past for the purposes of aid work entailed struggles with what is horrifying as well as alluring about the past, and unpredictable reformulations of the relations between past, present, and future by young staff and non-Japanese actors. I suggested that the Burmese staff's engagement with this temporal politics was especially instructive, as they simply abandoned the specific notions of Japanese pastness as the terms of discussion in development work.

In highlighting the importance of the past and the future in OISCA's work, my intention has not been to overlook the fact that OISCA staff also constantly engaged with the evolving circumstances of the present for NGOs in Japan and the countries where OISCA works such as Burma/Myanmar. As I mentioned above and examine in subsequent chapters, staff from various generations and backgrounds grappled with the complex relations and contingent events of daily life at the training centers and offices.

What I want to draw out in this chapter is that the intensive self-reflection and motivation that I found among OISCA's aid actors were enabled through various contestations around a sense of past (or anticipated) loss and an uncertain future. I suggest that the deliberations among aid actors over what pasts to inherit and what futures to create is related to the fact that international aid as a redemptive dream will always waver between oppressive and aspirational possibilities. In this sense, development work formulated through configurations between a sense of past loss and

preparations for the future is an impure and uncertain enterprise. There will always be internal demons to fight.

## CHAPTER 3: Intimate Labor and Care (*Omoiyari*) as Aid Work

### Humanity Smells

Humanity smells. It smells of impassioned sweat, heat from bodies in proximity. At least that's what I heard from people in OISCA.

In one OISCA magazine article, a Japanese staff member explained that he was attracted to the "smell of humanity" (*ningen kusasa*) that characterizes the commitment of OISCA staff to their work. The phrase "*ningen kusai*" is used in Japan to refer to an evocation of "humanness," literally meaning "smell of humanity." What this humanness implies in this phrase is rather vague, but it usually refers to being non-mechanical, exhibiting a range of emotions, and often making mistakes and struggling through life in a way that other people can relate to and feel affection for. This staff member explained OISCA's "smell of humanity" as emanating from people's simplicity that nevertheless was full of care (*omoiyari*), creating a workplace where everyone put all their efforts into their work, despite failures and blunders (OISCA 2004: 39). According to this man, therefore, commitment to the organization and to the work emitted the smell of humanity as the smell of labor, valuable for its own sake.

The importance of labor in OISCA was highlighted in the fact that, in conjunction with the smell of humanity, staff would tell me that the work in OISCA had a "muddy" quality. The first OISCA staff member that I met explained to me that OISCA was an organization that "smells like mud" (*dorokusai*). That is, work in OISCA was characterized by rigorous physical labor, intimate relationships with local communities, and the literal hard work with the soil in the agricultural trainings, rather than theory-

based classroom lectures. Many of the Japanese staff liked to recount how the first team of Japanese OISCA farmers who went to India and the Philippines in the mid-1960s spent all day in the fields, from dawn to evening, testing and trying different techniques as local people milled around wondering why these supposed foreign experts were working like laborers. One person in the Tokyo office told me that the first teams in India had no idea how to make rice there, in an environment completely different from Japan. Try as they might, even if they grew the seedlings as carefully as they could, the rice plants would die before maturation, drawing sneers from the local villagers. But one day, while one of the Japanese staff sat watching the paddy fields as the morning sun came up over the horizon, he saw that the ground was sparkling. He realized at that moment that the problem was the salt content of the earth and set out to improve the quality of the soil. They were subsequently able to harvest large amounts of good quality rice and gain the trust of local communities (personal communication, February 8, 2010).

The emphasis on the “muddiness” of labor was quite explicitly connected to conceptualizations of aid work as a form of care in OISCA. In 1997, a writer, Kazumasa Sakusa, published a collection of stories that he had gathered from OISCA Japanese staff overseas. Although the language is exaggerated and often sentimental, it does strike a cord with the ethos in OISCA. In particular, passages from Japanese staff’s quotes attest to the fact that care and labor were often intertwined in their understandings of their work. In one section Sakusa writes:

Kosugi [a Japanese staff member in Malaysia], after thinking for a while, told me this. “In the world, there are many people who struggle and work like crazy in severe conditions. Speaking with them, I have come to realize one thing: to ‘work’ (*hataraku*) is ‘to ease the lives of others’ (*‘hata’ wo ‘raku’ ni suru*). That might be for the family, for a cultural community, for a country, for children in the future... There are different kinds of ‘others,’ but the point is that it is never for oneself. It is in the sweat that

comes from working with all your might for someone else that people learn the satisfaction and joys of labor. I think that that becomes the engine for tomorrow.” [Sakusa 1997: 54]

Using the word “to work” (*hataraku*) and transposing different *kanji* characters on the same sounds to make sense of it as a philosophy of working for others, the smell of mud that comes from hard labor was the smell of efforts oriented toward bettering other lives for Kosugi. Care, in this sense, was a result of hard work done in the name of someone or something other than the self, the lingering smell of sweat and upturned dirt for the sake of another being. In this formulation, humanity was not a universal abstract, but rather, a product of labor in such intimate registers as the body and proximate relations with an other. This was what characterized OISCA’s work as an “activity of care” (*omoiyari no aru katsudō*), as several Japanese OISCA staff explained (Nagaishi 2010; Tomiyasu 2007).

In this chapter, I demonstrate how aid work in OISCA was constructed as works of care (*omoiyari*), especially among Japanese and Burmese staff at the Myanmar training center, built on what I call “intimate labor.” Specifically, I focus on the notion of care in OISCA as an effect of forms of labor that emphasized relational proximity and bodily activity—“intimate labor”—which ultimately compelled a commitment to OISCA in an imagination of “oneness.” I use the phrase “intimate labor” or “the labor of intimacy” to describe how intimacy between people required work and how this work itself was intimacy. In this sense, it was not an individual’s internal state of intimacy with another person that defined the intimate labor of care; rather, the struggles in the aspirations to approximate the other person despite notions of and encounters with difference gave rise to intimate labor as a form of social bind. Therefore, the way that I use the term “intimate labor” differs from Western liberal,

heteronormative constructions of intimacy as a condition of individual interiority epitomized in the private “subject-in-love” that has successfully shed the binds of obligational sociality such as family, class, and religion (Berlant and Warner 2000; Habermas 1989; Povinelli 2002a, 2002b, 2006). Moreover, intimate labor also differs from theories of immaterial “affective labor” that scholars have examined in global political economies (Hardt and Negri 2004), and from conceptualizations of intimacy as a shorthand for “social relations” or “personal relations” that are serviceable resources for global forces (Nishikawa 2005; Takeyama 2010; Wilson 2012) or sources of social equilibrium (Borovoy 2005) because intimacy in OISCA was inseparable from bodily activity and labor (cf. Parreñas 2012).

Thus, I suggest that intimate labor in OISCA should first be understood in a wider context of Japanese aid workers’ struggles to create “oneness” in the face of cultural difference in their work in Burma/Myanmar, as well as Burmese aid actors’ responses to these constructions of difference. Although these instances of cultural comparative work are not usually addressed in analyses of aid work, as I argue in the introduction, my contention in the dissertation is that such moments of cultural negotiation are in fact central to all forms of aid work. In OISCA, I argue that these negotiations of cultural difference constituted the basis for making intimate labor meaningful, which was defined, first, as sweaty physical labor shared collectively; second, as the identification of one’s life with the work at OISCA; and third, through ideas and metaphors of family. Conceptualizing intercultural and interpersonal “gaps” made the effort to create oneness through intimate labor in these ways compelling, and this was how aid work in OISCA was defined as a work of care.

The word *omoiyari* indicates a sentiment of thoughtfulness, kindness, and gentleness that can be translated in different ways. Here I translate *omoiyari* as “care”

rather than “empathy” in order to extricate the term from the notion that it is about emotional and psychological states or a prescribed cultural script of conformity (Lebra 1976; Shimizu 2000).<sup>36</sup> In particular, I translate *omoiyari* as “care” in a way that foregrounds care as enactments of social relations. Many ethnographies that focus on care as their object focus on the ways that particular forms of subjectivity are produced in the name of care as sick bodies, abandoned persons, and commodified body parts, for example (Biehl 2005; Cohen 1998; Lock 2002; Mol 2008; Pinto 2009; Ticktin 2011). Drawing on these studies on medicalized subjectivities, what I highlight are the intercultural and interpersonal relations that different forms of care demand and mobilize. For instance, Sarah Pinto (2009) demonstrates how the “care” and confinement of divorced women in a psychiatric ward in north India hinged on “their status as gendered subjects defined in and against community and kin networks” (7) with a “focused interest on love and its breakdowns” (8). Margaret Lock (2002) also attends to the ways that family relations, and in particular concepts of familial gift exchange, shape the decisions and care over the brain-dead relative. These studies show that practices of care are always practices of relations, as the constitution of the subjects and objects of care are dependent on the different enactments of their relations and other relations.

In OISCA, the work of care mobilized particular understandings of intercultural and interpersonal relations through the emphasis on bodily experiences in “the field” (*gamba*) of aid work. In other words, I argue that intimate labor in OISCA was about creating forms of relating to one another that were based on losing oneself to the labor, to the other person, and to the collective within “the field” of aid activities. These did not need to be simply in the literal fields of agricultural work; “the field” in OISCA was

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<sup>36</sup> I will use “care” and “*omoiyari*” interchangeably.



in the training centers, in the streets of Tokyo, in rural Burma/Myanmar. It was imagined to exist anywhere but at a desk in the Tokyo headquarters, albeit in a tiered imagination in which training centers in rural Asia-Pacific countries were understood to be “the most” in the field. In this chapter, I trace the ways that appealing to the value of labor for its own sake, the congruence of life and work in OISCA, and ideas of family-ness produced a sense of commitment to aid work and OISCA as a work of care among different aid actors, motivated by the possibilities that relational obligations of intimate labor in the field promised.

Aid work as a form of care in OISCA was thus defined by the degree to which one could lose oneself in the labor of intimacy in particular relations with others and with the collective of the organization, spaces in the field where self and other were difficult to separate and bodily activity was valuable for its own sake. Thus, I argue that aid work as care based on intimate labor was neither a representation of particular forms of personal relationships nor a specific condition of subjectivity; it was about the arduous labor of trying to subsume oneself within certain relations. At the same time, however, losing oneself to intimate labor was not the only idea of care among staff and trainees, and there were moments when other forms of care against this view appeared. In the end, I illustrate how these differences presented other modes of care, keeping in mind the fact that such differences were themselves constitutive of aid work in OISCA. The persistent challenge in studying OISCA, as demonstrated throughout the chapters, is how to maintain the multiplicity and difference of possible worlds without explaining one away within another.

## **Aid in Burma/Myanmar**

The first substantial article in the OISCA magazine about Burma/Myanmar was a report from Watanabe (see chapter one) after his preliminary research trip with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1995. In it, he mentions several times that he felt a strong sense of familiarity (*shinkinkan*) with Burmese people. Quoting the Japanese ambassador who expressed strong interest in having OISCA in Burma/Myanmar because there were no international NGOs doing agricultural development and environmental work there, Watanabe concludes: “Myanmar is in Asia. It is only appropriate that an NGO with headquarters in Japan should take the lead” (Watanabe 1995a: 36). He ends the article by expressing his wishes that both OISCA’s activities in the country and the release of Aung San Suu Kyi would happen soon.

In another article a few months later, Watanabe explains the first activity that OISCA conducted in Burma/Myanmar—a cultural exchange of lacquer ware crafts. He gives detailed descriptions of the series of fortuitous encounters that led him to arrange a visit from lacquer ware craftsmen in Nagano to Burma/Myanmar at the behest of Burmese government officials. He hopes that this will lead to exchanges so that Burmese craftsmen will also visit this town in Nagano. At the end of the article he states that “cultural exchange is a field that transcends political structures” (Watanabe 1995c: 25).

Such statements echo the standard accounts of international aid, and Japan’s position in particular, in regards to Burma/Myanmar. In short, the common view among scholars, commentators, and aid workers about Burma/Myanmar has been that Western aid actors ultimately aim toward democratization and Japanese activities remain apolitical. One of the first OISCA staff that I met had spent over a decade in

Burma/Myanmar, and he told me that OISCA's work was apolitical, unlike the Western aid organizations that interfere with Burmese political processes.

Discussions about civil society and civic groups such as NGOs in Burma/Myanmar have been dominated for years by the political situation in the country in the last few decades. Since 1962, Burma/Myanmar had been ruled by the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) and General Ne Win, which imposed crippling economic policies and a repressive form of government. Fueled by frustrations against the BSPP regime and economic mismanagement, citizens nationwide broke out into protests on August 8, 1988. The military violently suppressed these protests, killing thousands of civilians and forcing many to flee the country. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was established, and although Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), won 80% of the seats in the government in the 1990 election, the military junta voided the results and placed Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest for the following two decades. No elections were held again until 2010.

The actions by SLORC in those years, later renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), led Western countries to impose sanctions and former donors such as Japan to cut off aid. In subsequent years, governments have taken different positions toward Burma/Myanmar and its military regime, with the United States leading the most officially hardline opposition and sanctions against it and Southeast Asian countries proposing a policy of engagement.

In this environment, Japan has attempted to navigate a middle ground. As many scholars and commentators have pointed out, Japan had long been the largest donor of foreign aid to Burma/Myanmar since the Second World War, which some attributed to the "special relationship" between the two countries (Nemoto 2007; Steinberg 2001).

For example, Japan's foreign aid accounted for 66.7% of the total bilateral aid that Burma/Myanmar received between 1976 and 1990 (Kudo 2007: 5).<sup>37</sup> However, the takeover of the military regime and its violent suppression of civilian protestors in 1988 had an effect on this relationship. Although Japan became the first country to officially recognize the military regime, it suspended its ODA to Burma/Myanmar except for a limited number of humanitarian aid schemes (although the "humanitarian-ness" of these continuing schemes has been challenged by critics). Japanese aid amounted to an annual average of 154.8 million U.S. dollars from 1978 to 1988, but it declined to 86.6 million U.S. dollars in the period between 1989 and 1995, and further to 36.7 million U.S. dollars from 1996 to 2005 (Kudo 2007: 7). Accordingly, after 1988, the Japanese government also used the provision of aid as a way to encourage the regime to implement democratic reforms. For example, Oishi and Furuoka (2003) point out that the Japanese government responded to the military regime's release of Aung San Suu Kyi in the summer of 1995 by reviewing its aid policy and providing a grants aid scheme worth 17 million U.S. dollars to rebuild a nursing school in Yangon (Oishi and Furuoka 2003: 900). However, partly due to criticisms from the international community and Aung San Suu Kyi herself, Japan suspended its yen loans to Burma/Myanmar for that year.

Furthermore, after taking power, the military regime adopted an open-door policy, which strengthened its trade relations with neighboring countries such as China, Thailand, and India, consequently reducing the importance of other donor countries

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<sup>37</sup> Japan's ODA consists of Yen Loans (low-interest loans), Grant Aid (no obligations for repayment), and Technical Cooperation (technical skill transfer and human resource development). In terms of Japan's aid to Burma/Myanmar from 1968 to 1988, Yen Loans amounted to over 400 billion yen (about 2.8 billion U.S. dollars at the time), in contrast to 97 billion yen in Grant Aid (about 700 million U.S. dollars) and 15 billion yen in Technical Cooperation (about 100 million U.S. dollars) (MOFA N.d.).

such as Japan (Kudo 2007: 5, 9). China in particular developed a strong tie to the military government, and its economic presence in the country has been considerable, although the relationship has become more distanced since 2011 (ICG 2012). Now, with the new reforms sweeping through the country, Japanese actors have been quick to take this opportunity as a way to enter and engage with Burma/Myanmar with renewed enthusiasm. In the fall of 2012, the Japanese government played a leading role in helping Burma/Myanmar settle its delayed debts to institutions such as the World Bank (Kono and Nagata 2012). Mitsubishi-UFJ Financial Group Inc. announced in December 2012 that it would work together with the Co-operative Bank Ltd. in Burma/Myanmar to provide technical and other support (The Japan Times 2012b), and other Japanese businesses are preparing to enter the Burmese market in the near future (The Japan Times 2012a). In January 2013, the new Finance Minister, Taro Aso, who is a senior member of the lobby group Japan-Myanmar Association, visited Burma/Myanmar and met with Prime Minister Thein Sein in attempts to strengthen ties (Slodkowski 2013).

Against this backdrop of the situation in Burma/Myanmar since 1988, foreign popular conceptions and the media have tended to talk about civic groups such as NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) in the country as restricted. However, in recent years, both foreign and Burmese aid actors working inside Burma/Myanmar have been speaking up and attesting to the growing vibrancy of civic actors (Heidel 2006). In particular, “humanitarian spaces” and “civil society” have been gaining ground in the last decade, especially since the explosion of aid activities after Cyclone Nargis in 2008 (Dalpino 2009; ICG 2006; Pedersen 2009). For example, a number of Western officials and aid actors living in Yangon, the former capital of Burma/Myanmar, have written on the importance of capacity building, empowerment activities, and projects that mobilize “social capital” as an important strategy for

democratization, however unspecified these activities might be (Pedersen 2008; Purcell 1999; Steinberg 2006; Tegenfeldt 2001, 2006). Ashley South (2008) shows that in 2001, heads of UN agencies in Yangon met and concluded that “strengthening human capital, developing leadership capacity, and encouraging a more dynamic civil society will contribute to laying the foundations for democratic process” (South 2008: 204). This perspective has been reflected in the various local organizations supported by Western agencies, either financially or informally, which focus on capacity building and trainings such as the Capacity Building Initiative (CBI) and Myanmar Egress.

Although Japanese aid agencies have also been active in Burma/Myanmar and implementing projects similar to those of Western organizations, these have generally been excluded in the above accounts.<sup>38</sup> One reason that I presume from my time with both Western and Japanese aid actors is the surprisingly banal fact that there is a language barrier that inhibits social interaction between them. As one JICA official commented, although Japanese aid actors can speak English, it is an entirely different challenge to build lasting social relations in English with Western aid workers, and even sharing reports or collaborating on projects create hurdles of translation (personal communication, March 28, 2011). As such, it was not surprising to hear that Western aid workers, including specialists on agricultural aid, had never heard of OISCA, even though it is one of the earliest NGOs to have had a permanent presence in

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<sup>38</sup> For example, Japanese NGOs have been conducting empowerment, human resource development, and “capacity building” activities to one degree or another as well. See for example activities in Burma/Myanmar by the main Japanese NGOs: JOICFP ([http://www.joicfp.or.jp/eng/where\\_j\\_operates/myanmar.shtml](http://www.joicfp.or.jp/eng/where_j_operates/myanmar.shtml)), Association for Aid and Relief (AAR) (<http://www.aarjapan.gr.jp/activity/myanmar/>), Japan Heart ([http://www.japanheart.org/projects/myanmar\\_project/index.html](http://www.japanheart.org/projects/myanmar_project/index.html)), Bridge Asia Japan (BAJ) ([http://www.baj-npo.org/Activity/M\\_Activity/](http://www.baj-npo.org/Activity/M_Activity/)), Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA) (<http://www.amda-minds.org/index.php/projects/myanmar/>), SEEDS Asia (<http://www.seedsasia.org/eng/projects-myanmar.html>), Saetanar (<http://jp.saetanar.org/>), and Terra People’s Association (TPA) (<http://tpa.nk-i.net/myanmar.html>). Most of them receive Japanese ODA funds in one way or another.

Burma/Myanmar. It was a testament to the wide rift that exists between Japanese and Western aid organizations in the country, as well as proof that personal relationships (or the lack thereof) had immense effects on general aid activities. But among Japanese aid actors, it was evident that OISCA served as an exemplary NGO and a reference to which others could turn for help, from issues over office space in Yangon to ways of negotiating with Burmese government agencies.

### **The Work of Comparisons**

As Watanabe's comments above indicate, the idea that Burmese people seem "familiar" to Japanese people is prevalent in Japan. Accordingly, a language of cultural proximity also exists among Japanese aid workers in Burma/Myanmar, as well as discussions over cultural difference when that familiarity is betrayed. Thus, I suggest that an important premise for the efficacy of care based on intimate labor in OISCA was the negotiation of alterity. In short, as I argue throughout the dissertation, I suggest that the construction of cultural, social, and historical differences ensured that the work of trying to bridge those gaps, such as through the aspiring relations of intimate labor, appeared as socially productive. In this sense, the work of cultural comparison went hand-in-hand with intimate labor.

The negotiation of cultural difference seemed to be in fact an important part of aid work for Japanese aid actors in Burma/Myanmar in general. In August 2010, during my first week in Yangon, a group of Japanese NGO workers and embassy officials got together for a dinner party. It was an informal gathering with families and children, but one of the NGO workers, Aoki, had an issue he wanted us to address as a group. Someone whispered to me that this elderly man had been having problems with the local staff at their project sites, and so he wanted to discuss some issues with other

Japanese NGO staff to see if they could suggest solutions to his dilemmas. It was, evidently, not an agenda that the others were particularly keen to discuss at a party, but the topics that he brought up did not seem to be completely irrelevant for those present, and people engaged in the discussion.

All of us, about twenty Japanese expats, sat on chairs politely placed in a circle in the living room. The first issue on the agenda that Aoki posed was, “What was your first impression of Burmese people?” He wrote the question on the whiteboard. We went around the circle giving each of our answers. Several people replied that what they found most surprising was people’s kindness in Burma/Myanmar and the extent to which Burmese people would go out of their way to help others. Other people mentioned that there was no feeling of strangeness (*iwakan*) with Burmese people and that it was easy to become familiar (*najimeru*) with the country. The following question was, “What do you think are the commonalities with Japanese people?” A handful of people suggested: unassuming, reserved, indirect. When people began to talk about the difficulty of encouraging initiative and the willingness to engage with organizational reform among local staff, one person pointed out that these are probably things that are difficult for those present in the room—Japanese people—as well. Everyone laughed. Another person joked that maybe Burmese people are an exaggerated version of Japanese people.

Much of this first half of the discussion turned out to be about the similarities that the participants saw between Japanese and Burmese people. This understanding of proximity and similarity is in fact a view that has a long history. For example, citing the fact that the Burmese national hero, Aung San, and his Thirty Comrades, who later became the leaders of the Burmese independence movement, trained in Japan before launching their anti-British uprising, Japanese politicians and others often describe a



“special relationship between Japan and Burma” (Nemoto 1995). This language has been invoked by the Burmese military regime as well: for example, the regime used the phrase “Japan as older brother, Burma as younger brother” in 1963 when they asked for an increase in the ODA moneys that Japan had been disbursing to Burma/Myanmar since 1954 (Nemoto and Tanabe 2003). The reference to an intimate relationship has also been used as a reason for Japan being the largest donor of aid to Burma/Myanmar for most of the last fifty years, despite sanctions from Japan’s usual foreign policy allies. Japan has maintained a “policy of engagement” rather than sanctioning the regime (Holliday 2005; Nemoto 2007).

Commentators also often express Japan-Burma/Myanmar relations in terms of cultural similarities among the people of the two countries. A former Japanese ambassador to Burma/Myanmar, Yōichi Yamaguchi (ambassador 1995-1997), emphasizes this point in his book. He points to allegedly shared national characteristics between Japanese and Burmese people such as politeness, humility, the importance of families, the emphasis on social relations, and the respect for elders. He claims that even in comparison to other Asian people whom he has encountered in his diplomatic missions, there is greater similarity between Burmese and Japanese people (Yamaguchi 1999: 161-62). He proceeds to state that Burmese people in this sense are in fact even more Japanese than Japanese people today, and every time he sees Burmese people, he claims to be overtaken by a sense of nostalgia for times past when Japanese people were also polite and humble (Yamaguchi 1999: 168).<sup>39</sup> One cannot ignore the fact that Japanese colonial authorities used a similar discourse of intimate cultural similarity during the Second World War to promote a hierarchical unity between

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<sup>39</sup> A number of Japanese commentators criticize Yamaguchi for being an uncritical apologist for the military regime, twisting the facts of the democracy movement (Sugawara 2008).

Burma/Myanmar and Japan (Takeshima 2007). This perspective is also reminiscent of Koichi Iwabuchi (2002) who argues that the construction of the notion of “cultural proximity” and similarity between Japan and other Asian countries served to strengthen “Japan’s intimate cultural power” beginning in the Second World War and extending to contemporary Japanese exportations of popular culture (see also Ching 2001). As Ann Stoler has shown in her studies of European colonialism in Southeast Asia, realms of intimacy, sentiment, and care have in fact been central to the workings of colonial rule (Stoler 1995, 2002, 2006; see also Povinelli 2006).

This allusion to memories of colonialism notwithstanding, the language of intimacy and similarity regarding Burma/Myanmar infused the views of OISCA’s Japanese staff as well. When I asked the former director (1996-2008) of the Myanmar training center, Kawaguchi, why the Myanmar training center was able to become the most successful OISCA project overseas, he replied that it might have been because Burma/Myanmar feels familiar (*shitashimi yasui*) to Japanese people (personal communication, December 15, 2009). Dismissing my comment that others had told me that it was his abilities as a director that led to the success of the training center as a self-funded operation, he explained that people in Burma/Myanmar were extremely hardworking, probably because they have a strong foundation in Buddhism, something to which Japanese people could also relate. According to him, it was the similarity between the people of Burma/Myanmar and Japan, selecting Buddhism as an indicator, that explained the training center’s success in funding itself through its agricultural activities and the management by the local staff. Kawaguchi seemed to measure intimacy in degrees of similarity, and this was the decisive factor for him that made the development and success of the training center possible. This was in fact a perspective that was echoed by other Japanese staff, who often repeated this reasoning about the

Myanmar training center's performance, in contrast to the projects in Bangladesh, for example, which they saw as always about to fail largely due to the cultural differences between the people of Japan and Bangladesh.

While intimacy as similarity between Japanese and Burmese people was touted in this manner by OISCA's Japanese staff and other Japanese actors involved in Burma/Myanmar, the discussion at the gathering in Yangon indicated that this understanding of cultural similarity was not conclusive. One of the later questions on the agenda was, "What makes you want to say 'Give me a break (*kanben shite*)!' in Burma/Myanmar?" I did not quite understand what Aoki meant by this question, and other people also laughed and glanced around the room apprehensively. Aoki offered that, for example, he could not understand why young boys in the monasteries do not seem to do anything but beg for food in the mornings, referring to the morning rounds that monks do in Southeast Asia to receive alms from lay people. He was exasperated by the fact that they were not made to follow a discipline in their daily lives, such as regular cleaning routines, instead of begging for food. He felt the same way about the local staff in his organization. At this point, one of the participants, a young man who had been working in a Japanese company in Yangon for over a decade, suggested that perhaps these "give me a break" moments were fundamental cultural differences that could not be changed, or even be tackled as issues to address in the course of one's work. Some people nodded. Aoki seemed unconvinced. The discussion continued in this form for two or three hours, moving onto questions of management, staff motivation, and other issues until the participants told Aoki that they needed to postpone the rest of the conversation for another occasion.

I left the party-turned-meeting perplexed that the question of comparison between Burmese and Japanese people would be so central to aid actors' concerns.

Admittedly, this was a topic that was chosen by one person, but it was also a set of questions that seemingly did not come completely out of the blue for the participants. The sense of proximity and distance that these Japanese aid actors felt vis-à-vis Burmese people was not definitive, and it was something that could be discussed and negotiated in such conversations.

At the OISCA Myanmar training center, such works of cultural comparison were also part of the daily work for both Sakurai, the new director, and the Burmese staff. In fact, there were moments when the conceptualizations of cultural difference and people's reactions to it were more pronounced than mere comparison. In one particularly telling instance, Sakurai and Burmese staff clashed over ideas of cultural difference in a way that was not just about comparative work. During one of the evening meetings that always took place before dinner time, Sakurai mentioned a project that they were preparing for WFP in which they were planning to construct toilets in a dozen villages around Yesagyo Township. That afternoon, he had visited one of these villages for a preliminary study.



Figures 14: One of the villages where OISCA Myanmar works.

He proceeded to tell the forty Burmese staff in the room that Burmese people do not have the habit of using toilets. Although this is the same in many other countries, he added, it is a problem. “Here people live close to feces and urine—this is not a good or bad thing, but an issue of sanitation and hygiene,” he explained. He continued to say that this is not a question of only toilets, but an issue of habits—or the lack thereof—of washing one’s hands after using the toilet. He explained to the staff that in Burma/Myanmar the left and right hands are not even used separately. He had asked in the village that day and it was clear that people did not differentiate between different hands. “So what would happen if a child eats with the same hand that he uses to wipe himself?” he asked. He continued, “In all of you [Burmese people] there are bugs in your stomachs. There are no bugs in the stomachs of Japanese people” (personal communication, September 20, 2010).

I understood that Sakurai had spoken in this way in order to drive home the importance of hygiene and the toilet project. Nevertheless, I was shocked by his delivery. Throughout my stay at the Myanmar training center, I had in fact heard him make various statements about Burmese people and culture, but this instance seemed particularly blatant. The following morning, I asked two of the Burmese staff what they thought of Sakurai’s speech the night before. Given their usually reserved reactions, I was surprised to hear their frank and angry replies. “He looks down on Burmese people,” they said. They told me that the staff dislike the fact that he actually speaks that way a lot of the time (personal communication, September 21, 2010). From their reactions, it was evident that Sakurai’s intentions to encourage staff by pointing out the needs of villagers, and of Burmese people in general, did not have the effects that he expected.

After describing this conversation with staff, in my field notes I wrote, “I think that Sakurai is going through culture shock... Culture shock seems to dominate all encounters after the initial moments, and that subjective experience is how development is understood.” Although Sakurai had been in Burma/Myanmar for a few years by then, it occurred to me that his initial experiences of shock and incomprehension in an unknown environment seemed to have colored most if not all of his understandings of the country and his own work. In this, however, I did not think that Sakurai was unique among Japanese staff in OISCA. As I elaborated in the introduction, the experience of working and living closely with people from other countries at the training centers in Japan and around the Asia-Pacific challenged Japanese staff to consider the differences and similarities between themselves and local staff and trainees. Such considerations were clearly a central part of staff’s lives but they were rarely if ever discussed explicitly in the organization. It was no surprise, therefore, that the experience of encountering cultural and social differences was unprocessed in the form of aftershock effects for staff such as Sakurai, and that difference was interpreted as lack in the framework of development aid. Sakurai’s statement did not seem to be simply an expression of prejudice, but indicative of the ways in which understandings of cultural difference made their way into conceptualizations of aid work in OISCA. If culture shock could make one aware of different worlds and experiences, it seemed that it could also produce reactions that took difference to be deficiency.

At a later date, I tried to pursue the dilemma that I felt was underlined at the evening meeting with Sakurai: how does one reconcile the conflict between encouraging local actors’ capacities and the fact that aid work fundamentally focuses on the lack of local communities in order to make development work meaningful? My

question ultimately did not quite register with Sakurai, but his answers were suggestive. In his first reply, he talked about his view of development as encouraging local people to “beef up” the things that are brought in from the outside. What is important and often missing in aid work, he explained, is the transfer of an NGO’s “project” to connect with the longer-term development “process” of villagers. In response to my second attempt at the question, he told me that development work in OISCA had long been understood with Japan as the model of progress, but that Japan was no longer at its height and could not quite serve as a model as before (see chapter four). He told me that in such a changing situation, he was not sure if continuing the training programs using the same framework as fifty years ago made sense. In his third answer he drove his point home. He told me that if OISCA continued to do things in “Japanese ways” at the Myanmar training center, it would one day fall apart. “What is important is for the Burmese people here to take those Japanese things and make changes according to the context here” (personal communication, October 27, 2010).

In light of these answers, it seemed that Sakurai was conscious of the need to be attentive to the cultural differences underwriting aid work in OISCA. Yet, in his day-to-day work, he had articulated such differences in a way that Burmese staff had interpreted as contempt. The aftershock effects of cultural encounters and the subsequent negotiations of difference were ongoing efforts to gauge how to manage intercultural and interpersonal relations at the heart of international aid work, always teetering between an embrace of multiple worlds and a closure against anything other than one interpretation. One could say that intimate labor as a form of care, in this sense, was a way to recover from the shock and stitch together again the gap that suddenly appeared into view.

## Oneness and Muddiness in the Field (*Gemba*)

How to contend with cultural and social differences in relationships were central to the definition of “the field” (*gemba*) in OISCA. Yoshiko Nakano explains that OISCA is based on “a doctrine of field practice” (*gemba jissen shugi*), which she defines in the following way:

The “doctrine of field practice” refers to the basic spirit of OISCA technical experts who, instead of giving instructions with mere words, till and harvest the farm fields and rice paddies alongside local people, sweating together. The cardinal rule of OISCA experts (volunteers) is to put to practice and show through action the importance of hard work, first and foremost. [Yoshiko Nakano 1991: 156]

As mentioned above, this emphasis on labor in “the field” was a defining identity of OISCA’s aid workers. The centrality of the field is not unique to OISCA’s approach to aid work. Western international NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) also value the immediate experience afforded by presence in “the field,” which becomes the foundation for wider advocacy efforts (Redfield 2006: 13). Yet, for organizations such as MSF, a dilemma arises when these direct experiences in the field need to be translated into global messages. In contrast, for non-advocacy development organizations such as OISCA that emphasize long-term presence in one location, there is little resistance to immersing oneself in the field. During my visit to a training center of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) in Nagano, a JICA official from Tokyo gave a speech in which he explained to future volunteers that what was important in aid work was to “become one” (*ittai to naru*) with local communities (personal communication, June 7, 2010). Being absorbed into the field, so much so that the aid worker becomes one with the local people, is touted in many Japanese ideas of international aid as a foundational value, and a marker of Japanese aid work as a work of care. A common discourse in Japan contrasts “Japanese” forms of aid that emphasize oneness with local



communities in the field against “Western” approaches that always maintain a cold distance from local people, including the local staff in aid organizations.

In OISCA, the notion of oneness was particularly emphasized at the training centers. During my visit to the training center in Shikoku, I spent an afternoon practicing the morning routines. The training programs usually began in March or April, and so when I visited the Shikoku training center in April, I had a chance to learn the exercises with the new trainees. As I describe in chapter one, the disciplinary exercises were militaristic, with salutes, orders, and the raising of national flags. In the practice session at the Shikoku training center, we spent about two hours learning how to stand upright with hands sharply to our sides, how to execute a proper salute, how to bow properly. These demands on my body were unfamiliar, almost violent. As I concentrated on my hands to make sure that the middle finger was at the crease on the side of our matching navy gym pants, swinging my right arm as briskly as I could to the brim of my white cap as soon as the staff yelled, “Salute (*rei*)!,” I was jolted out of my own body, over and over again. At one point, the Japanese staff split us into groups of four or five to practice yelling orders. When it was my turn, I obediently went to stand in front of the other trainees—from Fiji, the Philippines, Burma/Myanmar, and other countries—and began to yell different commands. “Attention!” (*Kiwotsuke*) “Salute!” (*Rei!*) “Dress right, dress!” (*Migi e maware!*) The trainees did each movement as I ordered. Japanese staff walked behind them and fixed them if something was wrong. I was uneasy. I had never yelled orders at the top of my lungs, much less to command others to move in particular ways.

One of the last routines that we practiced was how to walk toward the flagpoles, raise the flags, and walk back to the starting line, in unison. I could not quite tell when it was considered to be in unison and when it was insufficient, but there was clearly an

aesthetic form that the Japanese staff were seeking. One of them kept telling us to think of the person to our right and to strive to match their movements. She yelled repeatedly, “Make your hearts into one!” (*Kokoro wo hitotsu ni shite!*) Not quite understanding how to demonstrate “making hearts into one,” I nevertheless did my best to try to move in unison with the trainees next to me.<sup>40</sup>

Some of the Burmese staff also embraced this ethos of oneness in OISCA, as I found out in an interview with Ko Naing, a senior staff at the Myanmar training center who had first come to OISCA as a trainee in 1998. He had also trained in Japan twice with OISCA, something that only a few of the Burmese staff had had the chance to do. Befitting his special status, he was confident and exhibited a willingness to be a leader in many situations. I asked him what he thought was the best part of OISCA based on his years of experience with the organization both in Burma/Myanmar and Japan. He quickly replied that it was how OISCA valued bringing together people’s feelings as one, “like family.” He explained:

It is not about separating people into Muslims, Christians, Buddhists. It is not about saying that one country is this way or that way because it’s poor or rich. OISCA taught me to make my feelings one with others. OISCA does this by having different people live together, without distinguishing between them based on nationality, ethnicity, religion, etcetera. Even people in authority participate in the daily cleaning duties, for example. [Personal communication, October 1, 2010]

Oneness for Ko Naing seemed valuable precisely because he recognized differences between people, even among aid actors in OISCA. But when I asked about his future

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<sup>40</sup> I suggest that the ethos of oneness is supported by OISCA’s religious foundation as well. The religion scholar Shimazono Susumu (1992) explains that many post-war new religions emphasize notions of universal harmony, the idea that all life is connected within the universe, and that this provides the ultimate basis of morality. Ananaikyō appears to demonstrate this characteristic, as one senior OISCA official and Ananaikyō member explained the importance of the idea of *bankyō kiitsu* (personal communication, May 17, 2010). The term exists in the teachings of Ōmoto and other of its descendent sects as well, such as Ananaikyō, and it refers to the notion that all divided things come together as one, and that all religions are ultimately one.

hopes, it was clear that the reality was more complicated. He told me, first, that he wanted to teach what he had learned through OISCA to others, and thus he wanted to continue working at the training center because it was much harder to accomplish things by oneself. Belonging to OISCA meant that he could access resources and facilities that he could not otherwise. At the same time, he confessed that he was not sure if he could stay in OISCA for long. His wife lived far away and was in fact pregnant at the time. Since she also had a job at another Japanese NGO, which actually paid six times more than OISCA, she could not simply quit and join him at the training center. Although Ko Naing viewed the ethos of oneness as valuable in OISCA, “making hearts into one” was no easy task.

While oneness was upheld as a virtue in OISCA, understandings of the field among OISCA’s aid actors in fact also referred to its messiness. During one of my visits to a training center in Japan, a senior Japanese staff told me that it was important for young staff to first experience the field (*gemba*), whether at a training center in Japan or overseas, because there was something to be gained in struggling amidst the “muddiness” (*dorodoro*) of human relationships on the ground (personal communication, January 28, 2010). He stressed that this “something” could not be explained in words, and could only be understood through bodily practice and experiences over time. Another staff from one of the training centers in Japan, a younger man in his thirties, writes in an article in the OISCA magazine that there is no manual for nurturing persons in OISCA’s trainings; the “textbooks” are the visceral experiences of being “tossed about by the mess and challenges of the field” (*gemba de momarete*) (Shibata 2006). He candidly explains that during his first year at the training center in Aichi prefecture in central Japan, he did not know anything and simply followed his elders, working hard to keep up. In his second year at OISCA, he was

transferred to the training center in Fukuoka, which he described as “an unforgettable year of failures.” He had no experience being an instructor, and had barely enough knowledge to teach agriculture. Trainees made fun of him: “You are just a teacher with rules without understanding anything,” “You are not a teacher.” His vegetable crops also failed. Yet, he worked as hard as he could, and at the end of the course, trainees who had complained about him throughout the year cried and told him, “Thank you very much, teacher.” With this one sentence, he explains, the suffering of the year disappeared, and he was filled with both a sense of gratitude to the trainees for giving him the opportunity to experience so much and a feeling of regret for not having been able to teach them as properly as they deserved. He writes that, years later, although he draws a line between trainees and himself, his approach is to “enter the emotional world of the trainees, at the same time that he pulls the trainees into himself, and it is the buildup of such give-and-take, sharing sufferings and joys together, laughing, and getting angry, that relations of trust can be built” (Shibata 2006: 19). The “muddiness” of the field, therefore, was understood as an effect of such proximate, difficult relationships—the site of ambivalent relations with others who were simultaneously antagonistic and transformative, moving between gaps and connections vis-à-vis others in trying to inhabit intimate relations.

I argue that this “muddiness” of relations and the struggles to create oneness amidst such relations that defined “the field”—or “fieldwork,” as it were—were at the core of OISCA’s activities, and the dynamics from which understandings of aid work for both Japanese and Burmese aid actors emerged. By translating the words *dorodoro* as “muddiness” and *momarete* as “tossed about” in the quotes above, I want to point to the sensation of simultaneous ambivalence and surrender that these ways of describing “the field” (*gamba*) evoked, as well as its tactile and earthy qualities. Specifically, the

notion and experience of “the field” derived, first, from ideas of cultural difference that arose in relationships and posed challenges to staff and trainees; in turn, the attempts to make connections, the attempts to bridge gaps to achieve a form of oneness, were also imagined to occur through intimate labor. The movement between gaps and connections was not unidirectional or stable, however, and the efforts to commensurate differences also led to the production of further differences. OISCA’s aid actors went back and forth between claims of cultural difference and aspirations to bridge such gaps, a movement that was never resolved, a “muddiness” that was never settled. As such, as the Japanese staff in the article above suggests, relations were both the problem and the solution: the idea of cultural gaps in relations posed a challenge that enabled the striving for human connections through intimate labor to be meaningful. The conceptualization of aid work as a work of care depended on the dynamics of cultural gaps and connectivity in “the field” that were enacted through the aspiring relations of intimate labor among staff and trainees. The labor of intimacy itself was the expression and definition of care.

### **The Flood that Never Came**

The conceptualizations and negotiations of cultural difference in the field were important aspects of aid workers’ experiences in OISCA partly because they laid the groundwork upon which intimate labor as care appeared meaningful. In the following sections I describe three modalities of intimate labor underlying OISCA’s activities as works of care. First was the emphasis on the value of sweaty, physical labor, imagined as a way to bring different actors together in proximate relations. The second, which I address in the next section, was the non-distinction between work and life that

characterized many staff's experiences in OISCA. Third, intimate labor also entailed an appeal to the idea of "family-like."

On October 23, 2010, Cyclone Giri hit the western coast of Burma/Myanmar. Although the OISCA Myanmar project was about 200 miles away from the eye of the storm, heavy rains and strong gusts swept through Yesagyo Township as well. By mid-day the rains had subsided, but winds remained strong, knocking down a tree behind the office building. We watched the male staff and trainees run outside with saws to try to divide up the tree before it could fall onto the electric cables. As we stood by the windows, one of the staff came into the room to tell us that there were rumors that the dam upstream from us was about to break. Someone gasped. A staff member told me that a few years ago the dam had cracked, and the training center had been flooded, damaging tons of rice stored for the WFP program. Sakurai also feared a repetition of this disaster, and as soon as he heard the rumor, he called on all staff and trainees to prepare for the possible imminent flood. A group was sent to the piggery facility to gather the piglets onto a truck, elevated above ground level, and to transfer the adult pigs to a safe location. The truck with the piglets was moved to the courtyard next to the living quarters. A few of the little animals jumped out of the moving vehicle, and staff and trainees ran around frantically trying to catch the zigzagging, wiggling piglets back into the sealed truck.

I noticed that the women staff and trainees had gone to the other side of the courtyard and begun shoveling sand onto a tractor. I quickly joined them. Most of the time in OISCA, neither staff nor trainees told others what to do, whether in Japan or Burma/Myanmar, except when staff were instructing trainees to do certain tasks during classes. It was the same in this case as well, people expected to notice what was needed and jump into the work, and I looked around anxiously to figure out how I could help.

Seeing one of the staff briefly stop her task, I picked up the shovel that she had put down and took over the job of hauling sand onto the tractor. It was harder than I thought, and my back started to hurt after only a few rounds. But the others kept going, and so I did as well. We did complain, however, and laughed at our lack of strength after sitting in the office for so long.

When the tractor was full of sand, one of the male staff drove it to the other side of the courtyard to the storage house that was filled with corn for the livestock. A group of staff was already there, shoving the sand into large bags and packing them down on the ground across the front of the entrance. They were creating a barrier to stop the floodwater from inundating the storage house. Several of us jumped onto the tractor to shovel the sand off the vehicle. Sakurai was also among us. Once the sand was pushed off, some staff went back with the tractor to get more sand and others stayed to help put it in bags. I joined the latter group.

Minutes later, I noticed that some people had gone inside the storage house and started filling bags with corn. There were two rooms, about thirty by forty feet, filled with kernels of corn piled chest-high. We were to put it all in bags and move them above ground. More staff and trainees joined us, and we split into the various tasks, bagging, shoveling, sealing, and hauling. The bags were meant to hold 55 pounds of rice each, which meant that I could not lift them once they were filled with corn. So I helped hold the bags open or put the corn inside. This was also no easy task, as the continuous crouching and bending strained my joints in ways that I had never experienced before. Once in a while I looked up to see that the mountains of corn looked the same, no matter how many bags we filled. I had to fight the urge to stop; everybody else was moving at least double my speed, including Sakurai. It felt endless. The dust from the corn was starting to become unbearable, settling into our lungs and

weighing our breaths down, all of us wheezing and coughing. Some of the men had wrapped their shirts around their faces. Finally, three hours into the labor, all the corn was in bags, stacked securely from floor to ceiling in one of the adjacent rooms. Staff and trainees swept the floors for the remaining dusts of corn, and the one room in the storage house looked as if it had always been empty. It was dark outside, and the rain had started again. After washing up a bit, we dragged ourselves to the dining hall for a very late meal.

The flood never came. But the stream nearby did overflow, and water surrounded the pig sheds for a couple of days. We all went to see it the following day, and staff and trainees in charge of caring for the pigs that week waded through the muddy water to get to the animals. Even though the preparations turned out to be unnecessary in the end, the collective effort seemed to have created a sense of solidarity among staff and trainees. We pointed to the water and took photographs with the pigs, laughing at the extraordinary condition of the training center.



Figure 15: Burmese staff and trainees rescuing the pigs from the floodwater.  
Photo by Van Lian Ceu.



I wondered if the ultimate futility of the work, the energy that in the end had not served a purpose, led to binding everyone together in a collective response to the potential crisis. In other words, the crisis on the horizon, not yet arrived, was unpredictable and incalculable, and there was no way to know what actions were necessary or unnecessary. But the fact that everyone exerted themselves in collective labor, the purpose of which was unknown or potentially meaningless, bound the staff and trainees, as well as myself, in a sense of shared commitment. The fact that nothing had in fact been necessary seemed to add a sense of communality, a sense of “no matter what” that perhaps would not have been so strong if the work was ultimately explained as an effective preparation, a well-managed response that seemed logical and reasonable retrospectively. The futility of it all shored up commitment.

In the days that followed, news arrived that some of the families of the trainees had suffered damages from Cyclone Giri, losing parts of their homes or their entire houses to flood. During a staff meeting, Sakurai announced that the training center should figure out how we could help these families, and to stay in touch with the affected trainees about what they might need. Staff nodded in agreement, and I was touched by Sakurai’s active engagement in helping trainees’ families. When I asked him about it, he commented: “Unfortunately we can’t help entire villages, but the least we can do is help the families of staff and trainees. We did the same during Cyclone Nargis in 2008” (personal communication, October 28, 2010). Sakurai was in fact from a small town near Kobe, and he had been in the city when the Great Hanshin Earthquake struck in 1995. He told me that five of his high school classmates died in the earthquake, and he had never forgotten what he saw and experienced when he

volunteered to assist victims in the aftermath. One of the reasons that he wanted to work in international aid after he graduated from the Tokyo University of Agriculture was this memory and experience of disaster and volunteer work.

It is possible to read this event skeptically, addressing the coercion involved in working for the collective and the paternalistic dynamic between a Japanese director and Burmese trainees and staff. Yet, Sakurai, staff, and trainees had all participated in the physical labor in preparation for the flood. It was a collective effort that temporarily suspended the hierarchy, the frictions between the Burmese staff and Sakurai, and the other relational conflicts among staff. This was an instance of intimate labor through which relational distances were shortened and the physicality of labor was emphasized to create a sense of oneness. Moments like these were what defined aid work in OISCA as a work of care, in which one toiled away regardless of whether the task was for oneself or for others, for some purpose or none at all.

### **Life as OISCA**

One of the most remarkable aspects of OISCA was that the majority of its staff, Japanese, Burmese, or otherwise, tended to exhibit great commitment to the organization and their work. When I decided to start off my interviews with staff by asking them how they got involved with OISCA, I only intended it to be a conversation starter. I was startled when this question, time after time, led to long stories about the person's past, perhaps even reaching back to childhood. Such conversations became indicative of the ways that working for OISCA for many staff was life itself.

For example, the answer from Shiraki started with him as a young man. He was one of the elderly senior staff at the Tokyo headquarters, somewhere about seventy-five years old, and he was responsible for managing relations with politicians and other

public figures. As we sat down in a crowded coffee shop in the basement of one of the major train stations in Tokyo, he told me that he contracted a disease of the kidney when he was twenty years old, and spent three days unconscious in a hospital near Toyota city. “It was a miracle that I survived,” he said. After waking up, he stayed in the hospital a while longer in order to recover. He had been sharing a room with an older woman, and she told him that when he was unconscious, he was muttering strange things, proverbial phrases and such. Then one day, the woman had a visitor, a young woman. The older woman told the visitor that this young man next to her had been saying strange things, and the visitor invited Shiraki to come and study at her school (*juku*). Shiraki did not accept the invitation at that moment, but on the day that he was released from the hospital, he happened to run into the visitor again. She was with another woman, and although they were both young and walking about in the city, they were wearing *monpe*, baggy trousers traditionally worn by farmers in Japan. Shiraki thought that they were slightly odd. When he asked them who they were, they explained that they were disciples of Yonosuke Nakano. He had never heard of Nakano. The women invited him to join the introductory course, which would last for about four to five days. Shiraki explained to me that these are called “first-time trainings” (*hatsu shugyō*) in Ananaikyō.<sup>41</sup> This time, he followed them to the Ananaikyō headquarters in Shizuoka, over 100 miles from Toyota city. Shiraki chuckled. “I went, without any reason—I just wanted to try new things at the time.”

Shiraki explained that everything at Ananaikyō was very strange for him at first. All the talk about the universe did not quite make sense to him, but he was impressed.

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<sup>41</sup> *Shugyō* is the term used for disciplinary practices in Japan, usually referring to religious forms of ascetic discipline, meditation, and bodily practice, but also extending to other activities considered to be spiritual ranging from martial arts to cleaning (Davis 1980; Reader 1991; Reader and Tanabe 1998; Schattschneider 2003).

For example, Nakano and his disciples would explain the relationship between the universe and humans in interesting ways. Shiraki remembered that they talked about the fact that women give birth during high tides—that is, when the moon’s force is strongest. And that people often die during low tides. “I was extremely drawn to these talks about humans (*ningen*) and life (*inochi*),” he said. “It really resonated with me, somewhere deep... I couldn’t help but feel that this place [the Ananaikyō headquarters] was like heaven,” he laughed.

He continued to tell me that after the four days of training, he returned to Toyota, inspired by what he had experienced. Soon after, Nakano began to build an observatory in Okazaki city, not far from Toyota. Shiraki received an invitation to listen to Nakano’s talk there and he went. Nakano announced that they were organizing international conferences for world peace and called on everyone there to join. Shiraki became deeply involved, including his wife whose family property in Tokyo was donated to become the current site of the OISCA Tokyo headquarters.

Shiraki concluded our interview by telling me that he lived by a life philosophy: “The universe shall move the necessary people at necessary times to make necessary things happen” (*Ten wa hitsuyō na toki ni hitsuyō na hito wo tsukawashite hitsuyō na koto wo nasashime tamau*). He explained that even if you want to do something, it is not possible to do anything by yourself. But at a crucial moment, someone appears in front of you to make it possible. He told me that he had had many such experiences that turned impossibilities into possibilities (personal communication, January 13, 2010).

During my time at OISCA, I spent many days with Shiraki, who took me to meet various OISCA supporters and politicians. In addition to his sudden affable smiles, what stayed in my mind were the objects that he carried with him. Over the course of more than fifty years with Nakano’s movements and OISCA, he had acquired

accessories such as the bolo ties that he wore everyday and other mementos from trips around the world. He also always carried a small red schedule book, brimming with extra pages inserted throughout. One day in August 2010, he showed me how he wrote down his schedule for each day—times, places, and people he met, written vertically and neatly in small letters in pencil. We had been visiting politicians at the Diet buildings and we were at a coffee shop taking a break. Opening the little red book that was barely larger than his palm, he showed me how he had sewn in an additional set of pages at the end of it. He explained that they were the contacts of everyone he knew that he put in every new schedule book at the beginning of the year. If he needed more space for new contacts, he simply added pages to the packet. He explained that the schedule book was from the shop in the basement of the Diet building, the same ones that politicians use. It used to be free for him—he did not explain why—but these days he had to pay for it. He opened the front of the schedule book and showed me how it came with the phone numbers of all the embassies in Tokyo, a map of the area around the Diet buildings, the names of elected politicians in each prefecture and district, and so on. He told me that he had schedule books from twenty, thirty years back. When he finished one at the end of the year, he placed it alongside the others on his bookshelf at home, bought a new one at the Diet building shop, and inserted the packet of contacts at the back. I wondered why it did not occur to him to buy a larger notebook where he could insert the contact information neatly, or simply use a separate binder for contacts. But efficiency did not seem to be his utmost criteria.

Seeing my interest in his schedule book, he continued to tell me that he also always carried around with him a map of the world, of Tokyo, and of Japan. Perhaps of other places as well. Placing his signature leather shoulder bag on the table at the coffee shop, he unzipped the top and swiftly took out a map of Burma/Myanmar, knowing

that I was interested in the projects there. It was as if he carried his whole life on his shoulders every day; or rather, he carried in his schedule books and maps the anticipation of proximity with other places, other persons, that a life with OISCA promised. Although he was over seventy years old and had spent more than fifty years with Nakano and OISCA, he had rarely left the Tokyo office. Furthermore, his presence at the Diet buildings now drew sympathetic smiles from politicians and their secretaries, who did not seem to quite understand why this elderly man came to their offices so regularly. I could not help but think that Shiraki may also be carrying around unrealized possibilities on his shoulders.

Although Shiraki's life implied a seamless unity with the organization and a sense of "being at home" there, it struck me that in fact the intimate labor of commitment was never final. During one of our conversations, Shiraki at one point muttered that he did not know the details of the Spiritual Congresses in the 1960s because he did not hold a central role as some other followers of Nakano, some of whom continued to hold senior positions in OISCA (personal communication, January 13, 2010). Furthermore, although Shiraki was in charge of relationships with politicians, other staff and especially younger staff referred to him with a kind of distance, as if they did not really understand the value of his role in OISCA today. In the past, relationships with politicians had formed the backbone of OISCA's funding and support (see chapter one), but in recent years, relations with companies and their corporate social responsibility (CSR) departments were becoming increasingly more important. In this sense, it seemed that for the younger staff, Shiraki appeared slightly out of step. The sense of commitment and oneness with the organization, therefore, was always still in the process of making, even for the elderly staff who had been with OISCA since its establishment.

It was not only the Japanese staff whose commitment to OISCA blurred the boundaries between work and life. There was a staff from Bangladesh at one of the training centers in Japan, Hasan, who had been with OISCA since 1983. He first joined as a trainee at the training center in Bangladesh through the encouragement of a man in his village who had trained with OISCA in Japan. Hasan eventually became a staff at the training center in Bangladesh, and built a house nearby with his wife and children. His specialty was poultry, and in 1984, he established the poultry project at the Bangladesh training center. Incidentally, Kawaguchi had been the director of the training center in Bangladesh at the time, and Hasan spoke fondly of Kawaguchi's encouragement in setting up the poultry project. Although Hasan first faced opposition from villagers because they were worried about the smell, ultimately they came to accept and even seek out Hasan's knowledge on poultry after witnessing its success and profitability after a year.

From 2000 to 2002, the Bangladesh training center sent Hasan to the training center in Burma/Myanmar to jumpstart its poultry projects. This was a time of reconnection for Hasan and Kawaguchi. In fact, Kawaguchi had had a key role in bringing Hasan to Burma/Myanmar as the poultry expert. Hasan explained that, at first, there was not enough money in the Myanmar project to begin the scheme, and the ODA funds had not yet been approved. Moreover, the Japanese staff member in charge of coordinating projects from Yangon was opposed to the idea because he did not think that poultry would work in such a severely hot climate as Yesagyo. "But at the training center, [Kawaguchi and I] wanted to rise up to the challenge," said Hasan. So then during one of the daily meetings at the training center, Hasan apparently offered that he had 1,500 U.S. dollars of his personal savings that they could use as capital. Hasan explained, "I was ready to just give it to the training center, but Kawaguchi said that

that would not be right, and so we decided that I would lend the Myanmar project my money.” Kawaguchi himself lent 2,000 U.S. dollars to the project, and another Japanese staff put in 500 U.S. dollars. The following day, they sent the 4,000 U.S. dollars to the office in Yangon, and the poultry project was started.

Hasan told me that the time in Burma/Myanmar was not always easy. As he explains in an article in the OISCA magazine, first there was the challenge of difference in climates between Bangladesh and Burma/Myanmar. He said, “The climates of Bangladesh and Myanmar are similar, but the [Myanmar] training center is in a place that can become as hot as 43 degrees Celsius [about 109 Fahrenheit], and humidity is extremely low, and on top of that it’s dusty. I struggled a lot trying to raise newborn chicks in this environment” (OISCA 2006). Moreover, he told me in our interview that Burmese MAS officials sometimes insulted him, telling him that Bangladesh was not a developed country and so Hasan could not possibly give them proper advice or succeed in his poultry project. Despite the challenges, he was able to establish a successful poultry program that is continuing to this day. He told me:

If we do our best, no matter how difficult, we can achieve it on our second, third, fourth tries. We can’t just say, “I can’t do it.” If we do our best until the very end, we can do it. So if we follow the everyday schedule in OISCA, if we bring fresh ideas to difficult problems, we can achieve things. That, I believe is the “OISCA spirit,” the “human spirit.” If we do what we can with our own capacities, it can be done. [Personal communication, February 27, 2010]

He was stationed at a training center in Japan when he told me this life story and experiences working in OISCA. His sons were almost or already in university in Bangladesh, and he had not seen his family for some time. Apparently his wife did not want their children to join OISCA—Hasan did not elaborate why, but I imagine that it had not been easy raising and supporting the family while OISCA almost wholly absorbed Hasan. “I am really grateful to my wife; she has supported me in every way,”



he told me. The sense of oneness of a full commitment to OISCA, a form of intimate labor in which proximity with others within the OISCA community was forged through rigorous work, was not without its collateral damages.

### **Family Imaginations**

The third sphere of intimate labor was the imagination of “family.” In OISCA, whether in Japan or in Burma/Myanmar, the idea of “family-like” was often evoked to describe the character of the organization. For example, Ma Khaing, one of the young female Burmese staff, explained to me that during the years with Kawaguchi as director, especially in the first few years when they were still trying to revitalize the soil and establish the training center, everybody worked incessantly like laborers. I asked her if people complained, and she shook her head, replying that nobody objected because everyone, including the director, worked together like family (personal communication, November 11, 2010). In fact, Kawaguchi, who was already in his seventies when he arrived in Burma/Myanmar, was affectionately called “grandpa” (*hpo:hpo:kyi:*), and everybody including the nearby villagers respected him, not simply for his old age and farming expertise, but also for his commitment to stay in this barren rural place for over a decade, rarely returning to Japan. One staff, Ko Win, explained that he had immense respect for Kawaguchi because a “regular” person (*pounhman*) would not be able to stay for so many years in Yesagyo Township, a place that Burmese people from other regions also considered to be extremely poor and difficult for agriculture. “It is thanks to him [Kawaguchi] that the training center is such a nice place to live in,” he said in Japanese. “We are grateful and indebted to him (*kye:zu: tin te*),” he continued in Burmese (personal communication, September 1, 2010). As I will elaborate further in chapter five, this notion of debt and gratitude played an important

role in Burmese staff's commitments to OISCA. Here it will suffice to point out that the Burmese staff developed an intimate relationship with Kawaguchi based on such feelings of gratitude, considering their training center to be their home and family. Several people at the training center who were trainees and became staff during Kawaguchi's directorship had photographs of themselves taken by his side, carefully displayed on a table near their beds. When I visited their rooms, they often picked up these framed images to proudly show me how much the photographs meant to them.



Figure 16: Celebrating the birthday of one of the Burmese staff members.

Even beyond a sense of gratitude and affection for Kawaguchi, there was a general feeling of “family-ness” among the Burmese staff. When I asked one of the youngest staff members what he liked about OISCA, he immediately replied, “That it’s like a family (*mítha:sú lo ne ló*).” He also explained that he liked how everybody lived

together at the training center without any divisions (*a:loun: hkwai cha: ma shí ló*). For example, he said, he got up everyday at 5 a.m. to clean, and so did Sakurai, and so did the most senior Burmese staff (personal communication, October 1, 2010).<sup>42</sup>

This ethos of “family-ness” was not lost on trainees either, several of whom told me that what they liked about OISCA and made them want to become staff was that it was like a family. When I asked some trainees what they were learning at the training center other than agriculture, one of them told me, “It’s like a family here, and you can’t just think about yourself; you have to think about others. When I make a mistake, our teachers correct us and that’s good for my development. I like that we all live together here like brothers and sisters” (personal communication, November 3, 2010).

This value of family-ness was prevalent at the training centers in Japan as well. For example, one evening at one of the training centers in Japan, the Japanese staff in charge of the trainings gathered the trainees who had just arrived a few weeks earlier, in order to hand them their monthly allowance. Before handing out the envelopes, she gave a motivational speech, telling them that they could talk to any of the staff if they were unhappy or worried about anything. “We’re family here, we’re brothers and sisters here,” she told them. Laughing, she added, “Some trainees in the past have even called me ‘mom’” (personal communication, March 7, 2010). Similarly, in a video produced by OISCA entitled *Like the Bonds of a Family: The OISCA Japan Chūbu Training Center* (*Kazoku no Kizuna no Yō ni: OISCA Chūbu Nihon Kenshū Sentā*) (n.d.), several of the interviewed staff explain that what is valuable in the trainings is that “everyone eats from the same rice bowl, everyone sweats together” (*onaji kama no meshi wo kutte, issho ni*

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<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that the value that Burmese staff and trainees placed on the absence of divisions within OISCA was particularly pertinent given the deeply ingrained separations that exist between the different ethnic and religious groups in Burma/Myanmar. As Ko Naing quoted above stated, in OISCA “it is not about separating people into Muslims, Christians, Buddhists,” and that was what seemed to be important in the eyes of the Burmese aid actors.

*ase wo nagashite*). In OISCA, bodily proximity mediated through shared communal meals, baths, living spaces, and labor ensured that oneness as an organization involved the trainees' and staff's lives as a totality. It was this intimate labor that created a sense that everyone shared in a common condition, beyond choice, as if they were a family.

In OISCA, consanguineal and affinal ties mingled with this evocation of fictive kinship. Many times I was startled to find that the elderly man I was speaking to at one training center was the brother of a woman who was working at another training center. Other times I was told that husband and wife worked for decades in different parts of the institutions founded by Nakano, one of them at the OISCA Tokyo office and the other one at the observatory in Shizuoka, for example. Non-Ananaikyō staff also often married each other. This was the case at the Myanmar training center as well, where several of the staff married each other or trainees, and raised families there. During my time in Yesagyo, there was a five-year old boy growing up at the training center, the son of a staff and a former trainee who were married. Furthermore, a number of OISCA's Japanese staff married local staff or trainees at the training centers in Japan and overseas, and this was a noticeable trend. One Japanese staff member who had been working at OISCA for over thirty years told me that probably about eighty percent of the Japanese staff in OISCA married non-Japanese people, mostly trainees or local staff (personal communication, November 10, 2009). He himself had married a Malaysian woman who had been a trainee at the training center where he worked. The joke was, also, that all the female Japanese staff who had been sent to work at the Myanmar training center had ended up marrying Burmese staff or trainees. Most of the Japanese project directors overseas had also married former trainees, raising a family at the training centers, and this explained why so many of them had been directors of the same project, at the same site, for decades. Sakurai who was opposed to such

arrangements commented to me once, “That’s not development, it’s immigration!” (personal communication, October 27, 2010). Kawaguchi, whose wife was Japanese and raised their children on her own in Japan while he worked overseas for over four decades, might have been an exception in this sense.

In a further enfolding of kinship ties, a few of the children of mixed parentage in OISCA had recently joined the organization as staff. One of them was the son of one of the longest serving Japanese directors of one of the training centers in the Philippines, who had married a former trainee, a Filipina woman who now held managing positions at the training center where they lived. He had thus grown up at an OISCA training center. When I met this young man, Tanaka, he was temporarily in Tokyo while he waited for his next assignment, taking advantage of this time to improve his Japanese language skills and acquire a Japanese driver’s license. As a second generation OISCA child who had chosen to join the organization, I assumed that he wholeheartedly accepted OISCA, but he expressed ambivalent feelings about it from time to time. His father had sent him to the OISCA high school for a year when he was seventeen, and he also spent a month at the Ananaikyō headquarters at his father’s request, although his father was not officially an Ananaikyō member—that is, he was not from an Ananaikyō family, did not get initiated officially, and did not do prayers every morning and evening. Despite these experiences, or perhaps because of them, Tanaka seemed to be undecided about how he felt about OISCA (personal communication, February 10, 2010). He was, however, clear about his interest in international aid work, and when I met him a few months later, he was preparing an application to join a training program on accounting and management for NGOs. He talked about the need for OISCA to update its management systems and hoped that this training would help him do that. For Tanaka, OISCA was not simply *like* a family but actually *as* such, even though the

difficulty of distinguishing OISCA from his life and family seemed to trigger some unresolved feelings. As of 2013, he is still an OISCA staff member. Moreover, his uncle on his mother's side who lives in the United States now serves as the president of the OISCA U.S. chapter, and in late 2012, this uncle's daughter moved from the U.S. to Japan after graduating from college to work as a staff member at the OISCA Tokyo headquarters. Thus, presently Tanaka has four members of his biological family officially working in OISCA.

While these intersections of blood and fictive kin ties created intimate relations between certain actors in OISCA, they also became grounds for differentiation and conflict in the organization. For example, Ananaikyō staff were usually involved with OISCA in some way or another from a young age through their families and upbringing, and this was something that could not be shared with the non-Ananaikyō staff. One day, at the Tokyo office, I was looking through old OISCA magazines as part of my archival research, and staff often stopped to look over my shoulder and comment on the old photographs or articles. Ogawa was one such staff. She was one of the few young Ananaikyō members who had recently come to OISCA as staff.<sup>43</sup> She was fascinated by the old magazine issues spread in front of me on the table, and as she flipped through them, she stopped at one article. "That's me!" Other staff around us came to look at the page, and sure enough, it was her name and a picture of her as a child, with an essay that she had written. She had apparently won a children's essay contest that OISCA had put together for an event in Kyūshū in southern Japan. Harada, another young Ananaikyō member and OISCA staff, came over and told us that he had

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<sup>43</sup> The story was that Ogawa had been assigned to OISCA by Yoshiko Nakano. Many of the decisions around human resources in OISCA were single-handedly and mysteriously conducted by the president-cum-religious-leader, a practice that some staff found objectionable. With the recent legal changes in the organization, I assume that this system will also change.

also applied but did not get the prize, and joked that he had been extremely jealous of Ogawa. They continued to banter, recalling their junior high schools, poking fun at memories of each other as children. As Harada later explained to me, there was a sense among Ananaikyō members that everyone was a relative (*miuchikan*), and Ananaikyō members tended to marry other members. As soon as Harada and Ogawa began to reminisce about their childhoods, triggered by the OISCA magazine article that was deeply integral to their upbringing, the other non-Ananaikyō staff drifted back to their work, unable to participate in their shared pasts. If blood relations and family ties created certain kinds of intimacy between some staff, there were inevitably those who could not take part in these relationships.

Although biological families played a significant role in OISCA as the above examples illustrate, I suggest that ultimately what was valued in OISCA was the fictive kinship constituting the imagination of the organization. For example, in Tanaka, Harada, and Ogawa's experiences, their family relations were interlaced with work relationships in OISCA, but what was important was that the former ultimately served the latter. In other instances, biological families were in explicit tension with organizational demands. Tanabe was a senior staff who was not only an Ananaikyō member, but also from a family that had been with Yonosuke Nakano since before Nakano established Ananaikyō. Therefore, Tanabe explained, there were many things relating to Ōmoto as well as Ananaikyō in his household, and joining OISCA was a natural progression for him. However, what he proceeded to tell me was unexpected. He told me that his father decided to serve Ananaikyō full-time in the same year that Tanabe was born. "I don't have any memories of living with my father because he was at the Ananaikyō headquarters my whole life. In that sense, one could say that I was raised by a single-mother" (personal communication, July 8, 2010). To stress the point,

he reiterated that his age was the same as the number of years that his father had served at the Ananaikyō headquarters. He continued to explain that, learning from this experience, when he became a young man he decided that he did not want to cause trouble and suffering to the people around him, and became a civil servant according to his mother's wishes. Although he did not renounce the religion all together, he explicitly did not want to devote himself completely to the institution of Ananaikyō. It was only after he made sure that it would not hurt his mother or the rest of his family that he joined OISCA—furthermore, it was, after all, not the same as Ananaikyō despite OISCA's great demands on staff's time. While the commitment to serve Ananaikyō meant that one would almost never be able to see people outside of the institution, working for OISCA was not as secluded as that.

The tension between biological families and the imagination of fictive kinship existed among Burmese staff as well. One of the female Burmese staff with whom I spent much of my time was Ma Su. One day over lunch she told me about her parents. Both her mother and father had an education only up to fourth grade, but they read a lot and had a lot of life experiences, Ma Su explained. Yet, because all three children had attended university, her parents seemed to think of them as better than themselves and often asked them for advice. Ma Su did not like this because she wanted to think of her parents as higher in status and more knowledgeable than her siblings or herself. She told me that her father suffered from diabetes, and when he found out, he became very depressed. He used to wake up at three in the morning every day to work in the fields, but he suddenly stopped working. "In fact," she said, "he stopped moving all together and would stay in the chair all day long." When Ma Su returned from training in Japan and found her father in this condition, she told him that diabetes was not a fatal disease and made him move about, taking walks with him and encouraging him to



do a little bit of the farm work. She told me that her mother would always tell her that it was reassuring whenever she came home because her father was much better when Ma Su was there. Ma Su felt bad that she could not be at home all the time (personal communication, October 30, 2010).

Ma Su was not the only staff who was often torn between the obligations at home with their biological families and their wishes to stay working in OISCA. Sometimes family obligations were so great that Burmese staff had to leave OISCA. One of the young male staff, Ko Kyaw, told me that he was a trainee in 2008 and stayed on as a staff after finishing the course. When I asked him the reason, he replied that helping villagers through OISCA led to making merit (*kútho ya ló*), and this made him happy. He explained that Yesagyo Township was an extremely poor region, and he could see that villagers were happy with the activities that OISCA conducted in the villages through the WFP schemes. “But,” he said, “this year I have to go home because there is no one in my family to work the fields, now that my younger brother is getting married.” His father no longer worked. He told me that he planned to introduce OISCA’s organic cultivation methods to his family’s rice paddies. He explained that he did not have the capital to do something bigger, such as poultry or piggery, but he was looking forward to trying out bokashi fertilizer, for example. Apparently one of the older staff told him that it was OK to come and go with OISCA (*thwa: le: pyan le: ya te*)—he was always welcome back even if this year he had to return home (personal communication, November 1, 2010).

### **No Labor, No Care?**

If the dominant understanding of aid work as a work of care in OISCA was defined by intimate labor, there were moments when other notions of care clashed with

this view. Specifically, instances in which there was no labor became contentious. At another evening staff meeting, one of the Burmese staff brought up an issue: one of the trainees was suffering from extreme pain in his legs. He could not even move. Staff took him to the doctor in the closest town, about an hour away by car, but the doctor did not know what was wrong with the boy. Another staff member at the meeting remarked that perhaps it was because he had apparently gotten wet in the rain a couple of weeks earlier when he was home for a holiday. It was simply an off-hand comment, but Sakurai seized on this and told the staff that trainees should not forget that they were still OISCA trainees, even during holidays, and that they should not go around playing in the rain without taking care of their health. He stressed that the trainees, as much as the staff, needed to be careful about their health so that they could commit themselves fully into the training course and life at the training center. A holiday in the middle of the year did not mean a holiday from being an OISCA trainee. He suggested that maybe he should talk to the trainees about being mindful of their daily habits and activities so that they would not get sick like this boy (personal communication, October 31, 2010).

I was dismayed by Sakurai's suggestion. His reflex to place responsibility on the sick person's behavior is a common tendency, not only in OISCA but in general—I have no doubt that we have all heard people blame the sick person for not having eaten properly, not exercised enough, smoked, slept too little, or too much. I did not think that this was an effective way to handle the situation, however. After all, one of the trainees had once told me that what he liked about the training center was that everybody was like family because they took care of each other during sickness (personal communication, November 3, 2010). While Sakurai saw the trainee who failed to engage in work as *not* an object of care, Burmese staff took the inability to

engage in labor as precisely what defined care and family-ness in OISCA. It seemed that the relationship between labor and care was not the same for Sakurai and the Burmese staff. A few days after the meeting, the trainee had a sudden attack of convulsions, his legs shaking uncontrollably. Staff rushed him to the hospital in town, and the next day, he returned in crutches. In the following days and weeks, the other trainees took care of him, bringing him food, playing the guitar and singing by his bedside, and even constructing a wooden contraption to make it easier for him to use the toilet. I managed to convince Sakurai to not give his speech to the trainees.

### **Intimate Disdain**

The effects of intimate labor in the face of cultural difference were not only about forms of relational proximity that were experienced positively. For example, one day, in order to chide a Burmese staff who had failed to send a thank you note to a particular Japanese supporter, despite repeated instructions to do so, Sakurai let out an exasperated comment: “I guess that’s what still makes you a Burmese person!” (personal communication, October 10, 2010). Intimate labor was not only about productive labor that builds cumulatively toward a proximate relationship of care; it was also a calibration of forms of intimate disdain. In this sense, Sakurai’s exasperation manifested at once the expectation of similarity between Burmese and Japanese people, and the profound discontent that arose when such assumptions were betrayed. This kind of intimate contempt repelled the other in a jolt, suddenly erecting walls of separation that had been unseen before. As much as Japanese staff, as well as Burmese staff and trainees from their points of view, committed themselves to creating forms of oneness through the intimate labor demanded in OISCA, the concealed lines of distinction between self and other always threatened to surface unannounced,

prompting an ever-present anxiety that the gaps might be greater than what the intimate labor could achieve.

In this sense, I suggest that the sweaty bodies, the conflation of life and work, and the allusions to family that mark the intimate labor of the work of care in OISCA resonated with notions of “intimate alterity.” Thomas Csordas (2004) proposed the concept as the “kernel of religion,” drawing on Georges Bataille’s (1989) ideas of immanence and intimacy in *The Theory of Religion*. For Bataille, religion was the search for a clear consciousness of lost intimacy, that is, the lost intimacy of immanence in which animal eats animal in a non-distinction between subject and object. However, he warned that this search is an impossible one given that such consciousness would arrive only at the moment when clarity is no longer a given because in intimacy the object disappears. It is this gap between the vanishing object and the pursuing subject that Csordas calls the kernel of religious experience, and he locates this in the intimate alterity of embodiment. In other words, we experience our bodies as always simultaneously belonging to us and estranged, and we never quite achieve intimacy with this primary object that is our body. In this sense, the ultimate other is not a transcendental wholly Other as Rudolf Otto (1923) proposed. While drawing on Otto’s attention to notions of the other, Csordas argues that the religious experience occurs in facing the intimate other, that is, in the embodied otherness in which the self strives to reach the object, the body, but can never seal the gap. Intimacy, in this sense, is not defined in the similarity between self and other, but rather, in the impossibility of taming the most intimate of alterities that sends the self beyond its individual being (see also Gernerchak 2009).

However, what Csordas seems to suppress from Bataille’s theory is that for the philosopher, intimacy involved a form of violence. For Bataille, the moment when one

arrives at intimacy is also a moment of the destruction of the object, and he takes sacrifice as an illustration of such an instance. That is, in sacrifice, the object (the victim) is destroyed in an effort toward the restoration of pure immanence in which animal kills animal, human kills human, without the blink of an eye. But the human does blink, and Bataille states that this moment is a moment of anguish that comes from the realization that the subject (the human) is of the same nature as the object (the thing), and humanity is found in this resistance to immanence, a resistance to the ease of intimate violence (Bataille 1989: 53). Therefore, if Csordas and Bataille agree that religious experience and “humanity” lie in the unbridgeable gap of intimate alterity, for Bataille this exists in the anxiety of being only a step away from the destruction of the other. Humanity and inhumanity are only a hair apart.

It would be inappropriate to directly transpose this structure of violence in intimacy to OISCA. Yonosuke Nakano was explicit in his condemnation of self-interested forms of nationalism that denigrate or destroy others, while encouraging pride and allegiance to one’s nation (Yonosuke Nakano 1963: 135-136). Neither do I claim some “kernel” of religious experience in the intimate labor in OISCA. Nevertheless, I would contend that the intimate labor in OISCA does walk a fine line between the humanity of sustained intimate alterity and the inhumanity of the destruction of both subject and object in the hunger for oneness. The demands of intimate labor can thus be both alluring and horrifying, comforting and disquieting, for Japanese, Burmese, and other staff and trainees alike in OISCA’s activities. I suggest that aid work as the work of care in OISCA was ultimately defined in this unnerving dual quality of intimate labor, the simultaneous ecstasy that propelled the self beyond itself in the submersion to the labor and the potential violence against both self and other in the horizon.

This danger of intimate labor was in fact something with which I struggled as well. On the one hand, I was taken by the relational proximity and sense of belonging that intimate labor in OISCA promised, and I joined in the work as enthusiastically as the trainees and staff around me. On the other hand, when Sakurai made statements with which I disagreed, I felt betrayed, and invariably, developed a feeling of disdain. If intimate labor in OISCA's approach to aid work emphasized oneness with others as a value to uphold and pursue, this was an ethos that I found myself trying to replicate in my own relationships with OISCA's aid actors. But as such, it made it difficult for me to deal with the differences that I encountered within such spaces, in moments when I thought that there should have been similarity, agreement, and relational continuity. The challenge in writing this dissertation is to maintain these experiences of contending with difference in the foreground without domesticating them as "diversity" or simple "multiplicity," or subsuming them into a violent "oneness."

## CHAPTER 4: Replication And Difference In “Making Persons”

### A Question of Bubbles

I heard two different stories regarding the origins of OISCA’s Myanmar project. The first narrative was from Watanabe. He was one of the OISCA staff who went to Burma/Myanmar on the initial assessment trip, and I knew that he had a particular emotional investment in the project. He told me, “Geographically, Myanmar is a kind of bulwark for Japan’s national security, but we didn’t have access for a long time so we worked in other places like Bangladesh and India. But we always wanted to go to Myanmar.” He explained that a breakthrough happened in 1995, when OISCA was being assessed for the Category I consultative status with the UN. Watanabe went to New York to represent OISCA at the evaluation committee. OISCA was upgraded, and someone from the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) told Watanabe that, now that OISCA had Category I consultative status, they should work together somewhere. Watanabe told him that he wanted to work in Burma/Myanmar, and the UN official agreed. Upon his return to Japan, Watanabe met with the official in charge at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and MOFA agreed to send money to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for OISCA’s assessment mission, with a stipulation that this kind of funding would not become a precedent for other organizations.

Watanabe explained that the OISCA-UN joint mission was composed of a Japanese official from the UN headquarter as well as other international UN staff members, a couple of OISCA staff including Watanabe, UNDP-Myanmar officials, Food

and Agriculture Organization (FAO)-Myanmar officials, and officials from the Burmese government. Watanabe said:

I was in charge, so I chose a location that had the worst conditions. Everybody agreed. Nobody was working on that side of the Irrawaddy River so the Myanmar government also agreed... Then, the Japanese ambassador suggested that we sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Myanmar government. There was no precedent, so we created one from a sample from another of our project sites and submitted a text that would be advantageous to OISCA. The government agreed to almost everything. Since we were now going to work with the government, we broke from the UN. That's how we started the Myanmar project. [Personal communication, December 7, 2009]

According to Watanabe, therefore, it was the fact that OISCA attained the status of Category I with the UN that led to the establishment of the project in Burma/Myanmar.

Watanabe's account conveyed a sense that OISCA began its activities in cooperation with other agencies. This was in contrast to the narrative that the Japanese UNDP official who had participated in the joint mission, Morita, told me. Morita, who was stationed in Burma/Myanmar for several years in the 1990s, explained that he had been looking for new NGO partners to implement projects in Shan state, the Dry Zone, and the Delta area. He had already taken the Japanese NGO Karamosia to Shan state because he wanted to involve this organization from Kagoshima, his home prefecture. Morita then chose OISCA as a candidate NGO for the Dry Zone in central Burma/Myanmar. Morita travelled with Watanabe all over the region, one of the poorest parts of the country, in search of potential project sites. The Dry Zone, as the name indicates, is an arid part of the country where there is little rainfall and temperatures can rise to as high as 50 degrees Celsius in the dry season from March to May. Morita told me that they covered most of the area to the east of the Irrawaddy river, but one day it occurred to him that he had never been to the other side of the water. In fact, no international agency or NGO had ever ventured to that part of the



region, and out of an adventurous impulse, he and Watanabe jumped onto a boat across to the other side, to the town of Pakokku. From there, they headed to a monastery in Yesagyo Township where a small, famous Buddha statue was kept. All Morita wanted was a playful excursion, and he had no intention of asking Watanabe to set up OISCA's project there.

The statue in the monastery was usually hidden from the public, but the monks, seeing that these were special visitors from Japan, granted a viewing of the precious figurine. The two men paid respects to the statue, and when they walked out of the monastery, it started to rain heavily. This was unusual at this time of year. Watanabe was apparently moved by this rare and unexpected downpour, and uttered, "This is a message from god—OISCA is going to work here." Morita told me that he was not against the idea of OISCA working in this region where there was no international aid, but he suggested that perhaps they should work on the east side of the river where the weather and soil conditions would be better for agricultural assistance. "No," Watanabe insisted, "this is the place" (personal communication, May 29, 2010).

This was the narrative that I heard from Morita. When he finished telling me the story, I asked him if it was acceptable for UNDP that Watanabe had chosen this difficult location. He replied that they were happy with NGOs working on their own, so it was not a problem. He indicated that he was not too concerned about what exactly OISCA did—it was simply good that there were more NGOs in Burma/Myanmar.

"Besides," he added, "it is indeed a great accomplishment and groundbreaking (*kakkiteki*) that OISCA has been able to work in such a remote place, maintaining good relations with the government and doing things on their own."

He explained that most other NGOs work under the auspices of UN agencies, such as the Japanese NGO, Bridge Asia Japan (BAJ), which works under the umbrella of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

“However,” he added, “personally, I’d like OISCA to cooperate with other organizations in more concrete ways.”

I asked him what he meant.

“For example,” he explained, “UNDP usually creates village committees to conduct microfinance and water projects, and this could be combined with OISCA’s WFP activities in the same villages.”

“But,” he said quietly almost to himself, “OISCA is a rustic (*soboku na*) organization so maybe they don’t do that kind of work.” In OISCA’s defense, I told him that OISCA had begun a microfinance project in several villages in Yesagyo Township.

“OK,” he remarked, “but there are already other organizations that have been doing microfinance, so OISCA could cooperate with them. Because I’m sure that OISCA’s own microfinance project would benefit just dozens of people or hundreds at the most, right? It’s important to create a circle (*wa wo tsukuru*)—to make one thing but then to expand that, like a bubble.”

Morita’s critique was actually an incisive comment of OISCA’s modality of work. As I describe in this chapter, OISCA’s Japanese staff tended to conceptualize the effects of aid work as a repetition of forms. As such, the assumption was that transformations in one particular space, such as within the training center, would instigate similar changes in other places, at other scales. In a similar manner, the training courses focused on the person as the unit of intervention, the person expected to be a vehicle of change at community, national, and even global levels. This went against the philosophies of other aid agencies such as the UNDP in Burma/Myanmar, which saw

development aid to target “communities” and “society” as the appropriate units of intervention.<sup>44</sup> This chapter is an examination of the ways that OISCA staff understood the mechanisms of how to generalize their work, and what was at stake in the particular view of expanding the effects of *hitozukuri* aid through simulative practices.

### **Morning Routines Everywhere**

The morning routines at the Myanmar training center were similar to those conducted in Japan. The only differences were that the mornings began slightly earlier at 5 a.m., and we cleaned the training center before the morning routines rather than afterwards as in the training centers in Japan. Every morning, staff and trainees in charge of different parts of the property and buildings diligently accomplished their tasks, while Sakurai and I cleaned the Japanese staff’s living quarters.

After a twenty-minute break at 5:25 a.m., the morning routines started. Trainees lined up in groups in front of the flagpole with the Burmese flag, and the staff stood in two rows to the trainees’ left. We all stood at attention, holding our hands into fists according to the military customs of Burma/Myanmar. “Attention!” (*Thek tha!*) the Burmese staff member in charge shouted in Burmese. “Fix your clothing! (*Mímí koko pyan sit!*)” The sequence was almost the same as in Japan, as we checked our clothing, and the weekly leaders of the groups of trainees reported to the staffer in charge about the presence and condition of their members using similar verbal formulations, although here it was in Burmese.

“Eleven trainees, missing one person due to sickness! Please give permission for the remaining people to continue their work in orderly fashion!” (*Thintan:tha: shíyin: 11,*

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<sup>44</sup> See for example the UNDP’s descriptions about the Burma/Myanmar Human Development Initiative (HDI) projects at <http://www.mm.undp.org/HDI%20Project%20Activities.html>, accessed on May 14, 2012.

*pyek kwek 1, ne ma kaung! Kyanlumya: tan:si pyi: améinnahkanyan athín hsek loup hkwín pyúba!)*

“Permission granted!” (*Hsek loup!*)

The staff in charge listened to all the reports and then walked over to Sakurai to give him the comprehensive status—in Japanese—listing the number of trainees and staff present and those absent. Roll call was then followed by *rajio taisō*, done without the Japanese music; instead, we counted loudly in Burmese from one to eight and then back down to one. The movements were all the same as in Japan.



Figure 17: Morning exercises at Myanmar training center.

Then it was time for the raising of the Burmese flag and the singing of the Burmese national anthem, which we did with right hands at salute, touching the front brim of our white caps.

These morning exercises as well as the general daily schedule of the training program at the Myanmar training center resembled the life and work at the training centers in Japan. I was told that the trainings were all similar if not almost the same at OISCA’s other project sites around the Asia-Pacific. In fact, in OISCA there was an emphasis on activities that resembled each other in physical structure and lifestyle, as

the training courses were all conducted at training centers built with the aim to create a similar communal environment as the foundation of training experiences. If someone were to mention “an OISCA-style training program,” one could easily imagine what that would look like. But as such, I was never sure: did OISCA staff see a proliferation of training centers around the world or did they envision the trainings to lead to other forms of community development? In other words, did they expect “development aid” to be about a replication of familiar forms or an extending chain of things that were related but dissimilar to the previous thing? Given that the Japanese staff at the Tokyo headquarters often discussed the need to follow-up with former trainees in order to help them make use of what they learned at the training centers for development efforts or agricultural activities in their villages, one might assume the latter. However, as I examine in this chapter, the ways in which OISCA’s Japanese staff placed value on replications and upheld the general view in official Japanese aid that Japan can be a model of development for other countries suggested the former approach as well.

In sum, what these questions raise is how aspirations for generalization, that is, for the transformations of trainees and staff according to OISCA’s vision to have wider effects, were mobilized in the training programs. I distinguish “generalization” from universalization in the sense that I use the former term to refer to a dissemination of forms, rather than a matter of an all-encompassing principle, system, or register whose particular origins are erased in a movement of “scaling up” (Choy 2005: 9; see also Tsing 2000, 2005). As such, generalizations do not profess to shed particularities nor do they appear to be opposed to them. The challenge lies elsewhere. In this chapter I look at the aspirations for the generalization of OISCA’s forms of *hitozukuri* aid work that were based on simulative effects, which were both about replications and extensions, neither simply about copying nor about complete departures from the original form. In

short, the use of simulative practices was a way in which the negotiation of cultural difference was foregrounded in the work in OISCA. In this sense, although I do not suggest a complete disavowal of reality as a “phantasm,” I use the term simulation rather than imitation, following Gilles Deleuze (1994[1968]), in order to point to the fact that OISCA’s activities did not uphold an original model and imitation-as-copy, but was rather a process of repetition that “involve[d] difference, from one wave and one gesture to another, and carrie[d] the difference through the repetitive space thereby constituted” (Deleuze 1994[1968]: 23). In this sense, what was at stake in the visions of generalization was not the accuracy of the copy of the same forms, but the discernment of how to handle the multiplication of differences in relationships.

In particular, in what follows, I aim to examine the pedagogy of “leading-by-example” (*sossen suihan*) in the training activities, in which Japanese staff expected trainees to learn from the staff-teachers through bodily replication. This ultimately demanded negotiations of difference and transformation for both Japanese and non-Japanese actors. In other words, I argue that leading-by-example was not simply about imitations, but about both the “model” and the “follower” of the activity needing to contend with differences in the simulative actions, placing the tension between replication and difference at the center of OISCA’s activities. Figuring out what to emulate and what to reject was an important task in the aspirations for generalization in the pedagogy of leading-by-example in OISCA.

This pedagogy of leading-by-example was based on three principles. First was what might be called the value of abeyance in which Japanese staff candidly pronounced regarding their work: “I don’t understand!” I suggest that this attitude embracing incomprehension laid the groundwork for the efficacy of the bodily practices of simulation. Second, the descriptions of OISCA’s training activities as *hitozukuri*

suggested a view of the person as a vehicle for change on other scales such as community, society, and even country, which was another fundamental assumption of the pedagogy of leading-by-example. Third, activities in OISCA emphasized the idea of Japan as a “model” of development and progress in agricultural aid work—a model in the sense of an original template for others to emulate. The idea of leading-by-example involved a method of generalization through this combination of the belief in abeyance, persons as vehicles of change, and models to emulate—that is, mechanisms of generalizations in which the abeyance of the person to the work defined by OISCA would lead to changes (for the better) at larger scales.

At the same time, however, the actual relationships in activities of leading-by-example brought to the surface the differences in “context” that the various aid actors brought to the encounter, putting breaks on the aspirations for generalization. Thus, the challenge in the pedagogy of leading-by-example was how generalizations could be realized while responding to the demands of “context.” Although on the one hand, leading-by-example seemed to be an attempt to preclude contexts, it in fact foregrounded the very notions of contextual difference and made their negotiation central to the work of generalization. In many ways, it is this explicit working out of contexts, without purging differences, that differentiates the process of generalization from views on universalization. Simulation, therefore, simultaneously aspired to generalize and multiply difference, foregrounding the issue of “context” in this double-movement. Marilyn Strathern (2004[1991]) and others have questioned the anthropological assumptions of “context,” arguing that figure and ground cannot be made to fit into each other like part and whole as if one could be explained wholly by the other since there will always be other perspectives that describe each as part of something else (see also Dilley 1999; Huen 2009; Riles 2000). But this did not mean that

“context” was wholly irrelevant in OISCA’s case. I suggest that what became central in OISCA through leading-by-example was the introduction of different perspectives that constructed one “context” in contrast to another. To participate in activities of leading-by-example was to generalize while contextualizing, that is, to grapple with the aftershock effects generated in the dynamic patterning between the rippling effects of mirror forms and the breaking waves of dissimilar elements, which left neither model nor follower the same.

In this sense, leading-by-example could not quite be explained by theories of mimesis in that mimesis generally assumes the presence of an original figure in a mirroring relation, and a general mystification of the mimetic authority. For example, Homi Bhabha (1994) famously argued that the power of colonialism was based on strategies of mimicry through which colonial subjects were compelled to mimic their masters to be “a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 1994: 122). In this formulation, there seems to be a presumed acceptance of the colonial model against which the “almost the same, but not quite” is measured. Certainly, Bhabha as well as others such as Michael Taussig (1993), have demonstrated that mimesis ultimately has the effect of writing in ambivalence into the colonial logic, making mimesis and alterity, similarity and difference, intimately interlinked with uncanny effects (see also Goodman 2009). Theories of simulacrum also indicate that acts of replication are not necessarily merely about copying an original, but rather, a simulation that destabilizes any notion of original or copy (Baudrillard 1994; Deleuze 1983, 1994[1968]). As such, these perspectives posit that the colonial project spawns its own undoing, or at the very least, its own anxieties.

However, the analogies on which these scholars base their analyses are telling as well. As Michael Taussig analogizes between the workings of mimesis in magic and in



colonialism in South America, and as Jeffrey Snodgrass (2002) analogizes between mimesis in spirit possession and in nuclear tests in India, such analyses of mimesis ultimately seem to mimic and mystify the authorities on which these relationships are based. In other words, as Sarah Pinto (2004) shows in her ethnography of mimetic ersatz medical practices in northern India, *mimesis and the analysis of mimesis* have the effect of naturalizing and rendering invisible to the analytical lens the social factors constituting the “magical” authority of development and state institutions.

In contrast, what was noticeable in OISCA’s activities based on leading-by-example was that neither the model nor the objects of aid were untouched by the demands to contend with something other than themselves, and thus, by the need to change. There was no ideal or authority that remained the same. Leading-by-example meant that the model as much as the follower were subject to transformation, or even disintegration, in visible ways. Moreover, this was not a kind of mimetic “magic” in which simulation and contact endowed power to the replication—if there was a kind of “magic” in the sense of being “lifted out of ourselves into those [other] images” (Taussig 1993: 16), it was through acts of contextualization that questioned the stability of that which things were modeled after. Contextualization in simulative practices in this sense was not elusively magical, nor a revelation of simulacra, nor a unidirectional endowment of power. In short, the introduction of other worlds to each other was not necessarily mystical, even if it lifted one out of oneself such as in the abeyance of the self in proclamations of “I don’t understand!” I suggest that the analytical task here is to understand how actors negotiated differences that people experienced in material and bodily ways in simulative practices, and changed the model as much as the subjects of simulation without concluding that it was all “hyperreal” (Baudrillard 1994).

### **“Leading-by-Example” (*Sossen Suihan*)**

Japanese staff repeatedly told me that one of the most important characteristics of their training pedagogy was leading-by-example (*sossen suihan*). For instance, the annual report from 1982 mentions the value of leading-by-example as a core method of cultivating community leaders around the world:

At the training centers, it is now tradition for the director to be at the front of all activities, putting his own way of life on the table for the trainees to emulate through leading-by-example (*sossen suihan*). Now, an increasing number of these trainees are community leaders in their own countries, spreading their spheres of activity. [OISCA 1982: 11]

OISCA staff took pride in this approach, as staffers often told me that what was unique and effective in teaching “the spirit” of leadership in the trainings was the fact that the OISCA staff joined the trainees in the physical labor, showing them by working together. As I demonstrated particularly in chapter three, the intimate labor in the field was a defining aspect of aid work in OISCA, and leading-by-example was an important pedagogy in this approach. Hence, the lessons outdoors resembled any other agricultural labor as staff and trainees all worked the fields together. There was hardly any talking involved during these activities, and trainees were expected to follow and physically imitate the staff’s actions.

OISCA staff often talked about imparting the “OISCA Spirit” to trainees, and when I asked Sakurai at the Myanmar training center what this phrase meant for him, he talked about the centrality of leading-by-example. OISCA Spirit for him meant the spirit of hard work, that is, the spirit of not giving up despite difficulties and being able to move appropriately when required. I asked him how he taught this attitude to local staff and trainees, and he explained that it was not a matter of talking about it, but a matter of the staff doing the work themselves alongside others. Trainees could then

imitate (*manesuru*) the teachers. “Basically their models (*mohan*) are moving right in front of them!” he exclaimed, suggesting that such interactions were a valuable pedagogy in “making persons” (personal communication, October 27, 2010).

On a different occasion, I asked Kimura, the senior Japanese Ananaikyō staff at the Tokyo office that I mention in chapter one, what his interpretation of the OISCA Spirit was. He answered:

In OISCA, I don’t think that many people think about how to integrate our philosophy into our activities. In the end, I think that OISCA’s activities are about teaching and learning about Japan. That means, taking care of nature, of things—to have them understand our traditional culture. Foreigners often tell us that they like the interactions with Japanese people, and they praise the Japanese people’s spirit and attitude toward work. We want them to understand how Japan was able to develop to this degree. That is why the basics of OISCA’s activities are cleaning, folding one’s clothes properly, etcetera. When you practice that overseas, it has great impact! We teach things like diligence (*kinbensei*) within the daily life of each country. For that, I think that the best method is to experience it with one’s own body. Leading-by-example (*sossen suihan*)—we ask them to understand this through everyday life. The training is not only about techniques (*gijutsu*), but also about coming in contact with the daily habits, communal lifestyle, and kindness of Japanese people. [Personal communication, November 30, 2009]

Thus, according to Kimura, leading-by-example was an approach to the training programs and to development aid in general that was based on daily, communal life at the training centers, where Japanese staff and non-Japanese aid actors could come in contact in order to impart Japanese ways of doing things.

This formulation might immediately bring to mind the notion that leading-by-example was based on a hierarchical relationship in which “the follower” (non-Japanese) was expected to emulate “the model” (Japanese). This was undeniably one aspect of OISCA’s pedagogy: the Japanese staff as well as “Japan” itself were regularly presented as the model of personal growth and community or national development for the trainees and staff from Asia-Pacific countries. The stated ultimate aim, however,

was not so much to inculcate “Japaneseness” in trainees from other countries, but to impart exemplary skills and ways of living that would offer hints in revitalizing their own communities and countries. Arguably, this line is thin, but I think that the distinction is important in understanding OISCA, and to a larger extent other Japanese efforts in international aid. In particular, it is worthwhile repeating that the two principles of upholding a Japanese “model” and encouraging trainees and non-Japanese staff to adapt it creatively in their own contexts should not be collapsed because the tension between the two was in fact an operative dynamic in OISCA’s activities. It was not one or the other, but rather, leading-by-example was propelled by the coexistence of both demands of replication and difference, and the changes to all actors involved that this dynamic caused.

### **“I Don’t Understand!”**

A fundamental principle underlying leading-by-example was the abeyance of the self in the acknowledgement of incomprehension. In particular, pronouncements of “I don’t understand!” were significant instances in which OISCA’s aid actors expressed the importance of ambivalence and uncertainty in their work, and still committed themselves fully to the organization. In fact, the claims of “I don’t understand!” were techniques by which people put their agency in abeyance, accepting the delay of understanding while they engaged in deep self-reflections about their work and OISCA (cf. Miyazaki 2004). As we shall see later on, the ambivalence generated by such forms of abeyance was necessary to make space for the negotiation of difference in the simulative practices of agricultural aid work.

The prominence of expressions of incomprehension in understandings of OISCA and aid work appeared clearly one day in the spring of 2010, when I found myself

staying at the OISCA headquarters office past the official end of the day at 6 p.m. I had to finish a translation job that I had been asked to do for the overseas projects department, and there was almost no one else left in the office. I was preparing to leave when Ichikawa, with whom I had barely spoken before, asked me how I became interested in OISCA. We chatted for a while, and all of a sudden he said, “I don’t understand OISCA at all (*mattaku wakannai*)!” He came from an Ananaikyō family, and told me that he grew up hearing about OISCA since he was born. His uncle was in one of the first OISCA teams that were sent to India in the 1960s. “But even when I heard about OISCA as a child, I didn’t understand it at all!” he exclaimed. For example, people told him that his uncle was going to teach farming in India and he had been confused. “What language is he going to use to teach? How can he teach when he himself has barely finished elementary school? How can he teach Japanese forms of farming in India?” Even after he joined OISCA as a young man and then again a few years later, after having worked as a fortune-teller in the interval, he did not understand. “Your family is Ananaikyō and you have known about OISCA since you were young, but you still don’t understand?” I asked him. He nodded.

He then told me that a while back he had a chance to read the first few issues of the OISCA magazine from the early 1960s. He said, “The first magazine had a photograph of Mount Fuji on the front page, and the first few issues talked mainly about the universe and geology! There was not even one mention of agriculture (*nōgyō no “no” no ji mo dete konai*). And very little about the OISCA teams working in India.” He told me that when he saw this, he did not understand. The articles on geology were especially puzzling for him because he could not make sense of the various details about rocks and minerals. In his opinion, the staff putting together the magazines at the time probably did not understand either, since they were most likely writing what “the

people at the top”—the Ananaikyō leaders and Yonosuke Nakano—were telling them to write. I asked Ichikawa if he thought that the older generations at OISCA today might understand the organization. He shook his head. “I don’t think that they understand either, but they are of a generation that just went and did things even if they didn’t understand,” he said. “I think that they understand that it’s impossible to understand.”

I wondered out loud how interesting it was that staff at OISCA continued to work there even if they did not really understand what was going on. “Oh, I have an answer for *that*,” he laughed. “It’s about a sense of mission (*shimeikan*).” “But how do you get a sense of mission?” I asked. “From experience (*taiken*), of course,” he replied. He continued:

Experience is about the whole (*zentai*). For example, when the trainees leave Japan at the end of the training courses, they write in the OISCA magazine that they learned a lot and will continue the OISCA Spirit in their home countries and such, but they don’t actually understand... Only years later, having worked in their own countries for a while, they come to understand. So it’s about experience, and about the whole. Analysis (*bunseki*) is about breaking things down into parts and looking at those parts, but putting those parts together doesn’t create the whole. From analysis, you cannot see the whole. It’s only from the whole that you can understand the parts. [Personal communication, March 19, 2010]

In this way, after years of not understanding, he had come to the realization that the emphasis on the universe in Yonosuke Nakano’s philosophy and OISCA’s mission made sense in this way. “You can’t get more ‘whole’ than the universe! So I think that OISCA takes the universe as the whole to understand the parts,” he said.<sup>45</sup>

He told me that he had come to this understanding after reading the writings of Hideo Kobayashi, a 20th century Japanese literary critic who theorized on Henri Bergson’s ideas of consciousness (*ninshiki*). Ichikawa explained that Kobayashi wrote

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<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, in the first few weeks of January 2013, Shimada posted messages on the OISCA-International listserv about the idea of “whole-ism.”

about the ways that a person sees a pansy: as soon as one thinks of the word “pansy,” one’s own preconceived notion of the flower comes to mind, and one is unable to see the object in actuality (see Kobayashi 2004[1957]: 246-252). This is what happens with criticism and analysis, he stated. As Ichikawa explained to me, people like artists, however, can see the pansy as it is, in “reality,” and thus they are “able to draw the pansy in many different ways.”

It does not matter whether Ichikawa was accurate in his rendition of Kobayashi or Bergson; neither is it important that he did not elaborate further on the connections between these thinkers and the issue of wholes and parts in OISCA. What I suggest is significant in his philosophizing is the foregrounding of his position of “I don’t understand!” through which he was able to argue the value of experience, and of the abeyance of one’s self to the work and relationships at hand. At the same time, it is notable that in this expression of incomprehension for himself as well as for others, he highlighted the uncertainty that characterized OISCA’s activities. After all, it would be only years later that trainees would understand what it was that they learned from the training programs, according to Ichikawa. At the same time, if this uncertainty of delayed understanding is connected to the vision of “the whole” as he outlined in our conversation, and if the perspective of “the whole” of “reality” meant that one could see things in “many different ways,” Ichikawa seemed to propose that the abeyance of the self in OISCA was about the engagement with the differences that defined the work. Conversely, it suggests that the demand to contend with the double-takes of intercultural and interpersonal relationships central to OISCA’s activities seems to have led Ichikawa to develop this theory of “the whole” as a way to make sense of it all.

If Ichikawa had drawn on philosophers in order to articulate his incomprehension of OISCA, other staff turned to ideas of nature. Furuichi, for example,

was one of the senior staff members who had grown up in an Ananaikyō household, and had devoted most of his adult life to OISCA. Slight in height and build but with an energetic gait that always made him seem slightly jumpy, he told me that his life as well as his body changed dramatically after battling with stomach cancer a few years back. “I used to be quite large,” he said. During our three-hour interview, he reminisced how much fun it had been for him as a young boy in rural Aomori in northern Japan, whose home was an Ananaikyō chapter and always full of men who visited his father from all over Japan. These men and his father would talk for hours into the night about spiritual matters, the universe, and world peace, and Furuichi as a child would listen at their side, enraptured. He told me about his experiences moving to Tokyo, about eventually joining OISCA after a near-death experience, about being assigned to the East Timor training center, and the various challenges he had faced over the years both abroad and in Japan, professionally as well as personally.

“Sometimes I am not sure if it is really me doing these things,” he said at one point. I asked him what he meant. He explained that sometimes he felt as if he were possessed by the natural world (*shizenkai*), invisible to the eye. When I asked him why he felt this way, he told me that sometimes he found himself able to do things beyond his abilities. “I go to places like East Timor without any experience or knowledge, but it succeeds!” he exclaimed.

This proclamation of incomprehension as the basis and even license to speak candidly about his accomplishments was bolstered further by his philosophy about agriculture. “Agriculture is a form of education,” he told me. “Agriculture cannot lie,” he stated, “and if you can teach people through agriculture, you can make a decent (*mattou na*) person.” He continued, “Agriculture is a means (*shudan*) for OISCA to nurture people with a big and clean *kokoro* (“heart-mind”).” In this sense, he added, the



purpose was not to create technicians and farmers, but to create persons who are respectful of one another and of the natural environment. He explained that this was what he wanted to impart to trainees:

Daikon radishes grow by turning around and around like a screw. So if you turn the daikon slightly—unscrew it—before pulling it out, it comes out very easily. This means that you can understand the entire universe with just one daikon. It means that the daikon is looking toward the sun as its parent, turning around and around so that every side faces the parent equally as it grows. In that way, the daikon is teaching us everything. Just by studying the world of daikon, we can see the universe, the power of the sun. This is the *kokoro* of agriculture. [Personal communication, June 25, 2010]

In this formulation, as much as people were seen to work upon nature, nature was working upon humans, seen to have a *kokoro* of its own. The person opened toward the unknown other that was nature and was asked to respond, to take a step closer to becoming more like a vegetable through an abeyance of the human self and acts of emulation. Furuichi continued:

Nurturing the *kokoro* of vegetables will nurture the *kokoro* of humans... If that kind of thinking were to spread, there wouldn't be any more crime. Because there is no crime among vegetables! In the world of vegetables, parents and children don't kill each other, and friends don't kill friends. Once one understands nature and the *kokoro* of vegetables, one loses the *kokoro* of wanting to commit a crime. That's the way to direct society toward a better direction. Vegetables will cleanse society. That's what agriculture is about. [Personal communication, June 25, 2010]

According to Furuichi, then, vegetables had a *kokoro* that was pure and moral, such as the natural inclination to face “the parent” (i.e. the sun), and this was an orientation that he thought people should copy and embody in order to initiate larger societal changes.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> On one level, scholars have understood *kokoro* as the core of the uniquely Japanese inner self, which points to a constellation of the mind, heart, will, and sentiment (Hearn 1907[1895]). Joyce Lebra (1992) argues that, unlike the “outer self” that is socially circumscribed, the *kokoro* “can be free, spontaneous, and even asocial... a reservoir of truthfulness and purity” (Lebra 1992: 112). On another level, Lebra explains that if the *kokoro* is strong and pure enough, it “will eventually



Figure 18: Trainees harvesting cabbages in Japan and squash in Burma/Myanmar. Photo on the right by Van Lian Ceu.

Similar visions of self-transformation based on bodily replications of the natural world are present in Ellen Schattschneider's (2004) moving account of mountain worshippers in northern Japan. In her study, devotees engage in physical labor and in interactions with the mountain's material form through simulative acts as a way to propel themselves to a higher spiritual state. In a vivid moment, Schattschneider describes how "the worshipper's body learns to transpose itself from its usual expanded comportment into confined disciplinary spaces created for it by the kami [gods] (like caves), and it thus adjusts itself to their more perfect contours" (Schattschneider 2003: 162). Furthermore, Schattschneider writes that such bodily acts of devotion should be infused with "sincere *kokoro*" in order to activate a productive exchange between human and divinity (Schattschneider 2003: 129). The strangeness of

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remove the communication barrier and reach another's heart (*kokoro ga tsūji au*)... in heart-to-heart communication" (Lebra 1992: 113). *Kokoro* is seen here as a domain that not only marks a pure inner self, but can become the basis for connection with others. Similarly, the increasing focus on world transformation (*yonaoshi*) and personal change through "healing the heart" (*kokoro naoshi*) in new religions points to this validation of *kokoro* as a way to create harmonious, universal human relationships (Hardacre 1986; Reader 1990: 59; Robertson 1991; Shimazono 1993).

a human body resembling in form the physical qualities of the natural landscape becomes directly proportional to the spiritual elevation of a person. In other words, simulative practices depend on the person's ability of abeyance—the skill to open oneself to the labor and to the “other,” despite incomprehension and the uncertainty of the outcome. As we shall see, leading-by-example was in fact a pedagogy that called for such abeyance, not only from “the follower,” but also from “the model.”

### **Making Persons and Context**

A second basic principle underlying the pedagogy of leading-by-example in OISCA was that change in development aid could and should happen through the person (*hito*). The OISCA magazine archives attest to this long-held dominant view in the organization. For example, in a roundtable discussion that happened among ministry officials, politicians, and Yoshiko Nakano in 1986, the participants seemed to agree that the most efficient use of ODA moneys would be to channel it to activities such as those conducted by OISCA, that is, projects at the grassroots level such as the training of human resources in local communities (OISCA 1986). Fujita, one of the ministry officials, points out that the most successful kinds of aid are those that see persons as vehicles of development (*hito wo baitai ni shita enjo*), such as in training activities. This validation of NGOs such as OISCA for their work conceiving “persons as vehicles” is noteworthy. That is, this perspective seemed to enable the bypassing of “context”—of the social environment within which the objects of aid were thought to exist—and the construction of an abstract notion of “the person” as the site of aid intervention and transformation.

My understanding of OISCA's activities is that the linkage between persons and their contexts has been left as a black box. This might recall neoliberal

conceptualizations of the autonomous individual of freedom, empowerment, self-government, and entrepreneurial capacities in contemporary Japan and elsewhere (Arai 2005; Feher 2009; Itoh 2004). Nevertheless, I maintain that OISCA's form of conceptualizing persons differs in that the person (*hito*) was never described as "an individual" (*kojin*) and the purpose was not to incorporate persons into the logic of market economies. What the black box achieved was to create, once again, the "gap" into which OISCA could claim its place as the proxy-space between persons and the world (see chapter one). The person in this sense was conceptualized as a kind of placeholder with the capacity to be attached to and detached from different contexts—but not always in intended ways, as I elaborate below.

This idea of the decontextualized person as the site of international aid work was captured nicely in a speech by an LDP representative and vice chairman of the LDP policy research council, Moto-o Shiina, reprinted in the OISCA magazine (Shiina 1985). He began his talk by saying that he was often called an "international" politician (*kokusaiha*), and explained what that meant for him. He recounted his experiences living overseas, and how he had come to realize that he ended up not knowing anything about other countries—that is, that it was impossible to say anything general or definitive about a country because there were always too many internal differences in that country. Thus, he stated, he "ended up at the level of persons," and realized that once you could understand that, you could live anywhere. He applauded OISCA, in this sense, for working in "the field" (*gamba*), with the person as its focus—as such, he stated that OISCA staff (presumably referring only to the Japanese staff) and their work must be more international (*kokusaiha*) than him. In this formulation, he suggested that, although one could not speak consistently of "countries" or even "cultures" because of the infinite number of differentiations within them, one could refer to and engage on

the level of persons, which Shiina believed was a universal unified unit. In his view, persons were whole numbers. As such, he seemed to believe that engagements and changes through “the person” could be generalized to other places and subjects. Transformations on “the level of persons” could thereby bring about change on other scales in this worldview.

What I have discussed thus far, however, derives from articles in the OISCA magazine between 1966 and the 1990s, and from my conversations about those first few decades with staff and supporters. I suggest that after the 1990s the discourse changed in emphasis, namely, to take contexts more into account in the definition of aid work. I do not intend to over-emphasize the difference between the eras because I think that the staff members implementing the projects and trainings were always negotiating the relationship between Japan and other countries, “the person” and “context.” Nevertheless, I point out the general changes that have taken place in the conceptualization of international aid in OISCA’s trajectory that have involved different configurations of the person and their sociocultural environment, and in particular the struggles with contextual differences that never made “the level of the person” as universal as Shiina proposed.

Taking the Myanmar project as an example, I suggest that there was a transformation in OISCA’s conceptualization of international aid and *hitozukuri*, specifically in shifting focus from persons unmoored from context to taking cultural backgrounds and their social environments into account. The first hints of this new orientation appear in an article from 2002, written by a Japanese staffer from a training center in Japan who visited the Myanmar training center. He explains that in teaching trainees from different countries in Japan, the trainees had many habits and dispositions that he found strange. “However,” he writes, “what was strange about them probably

derived largely from their cultures,” and so Japanese staff were occasionally sent to the overseas projects to experience the trainees’ countries first-hand. This was a recognition of trainees’ backgrounds and a willingness to learn about them that do not appear in the OISCA magazine articles from earlier decades. He explains that in visiting the Myanmar training center, he realized that those who are selected to go to Japan are those who have “the brains, stamina, and drive (*kiryoku*)” to understand a foreign culture like Japan and overcome the many obstacles. He admits: “The fact that we have to instruct them in everything [like cleaning and discipline] is probably not because of their [lacking] nature (*shishitsu*), but because their cultural backgrounds are different” (Ikeda 2002: 5). Setting aside the problem of seeing “their culture” as needing instruction, what is notable here is that this admission of cultural context and differences in the conceptualization of the person was new in OISCA’s discourses.

In another example, a Japanese employee from Tokyo describes her experience visiting the Myanmar training center, and particularly to report on the 2006 project that trained women in nearby villages in food processing skills, funded by a Japanese ODA scheme. She writes how the trainings showed local women how to create added value to their crops, encouraging their self-reliance (*jijo doryoku*) and securing a stable source of income for farming families. She concludes that the trainings appeared to have raised general motivation for production (*seisan iyoku*) among villagers, increased their knowledge about nutrition and hygiene, and thus had the potential to improve the livelihoods of entire villages (Ishihara 2007: 8).

This attention to wider impact and regional context, however, still seemed to be ultimately anchored in ideas of “the person.” In an article, Sakurai is quoted as saying that the most important thing for OISCA and development work in general is to encourage local actors to tackle the challenges of their own communities. Outsiders

cannot do this for them because that would inhibit self-sustaining (*jiritsuteki*) development. He expressed that “believing in the infinite capacities of the other [the local staff, trainees, and local communities], to extend this to its maximum potential—that’s how the path toward progress opens up” (OISCA 2010a: 13). The same article that quoted Sakurai summarized the connection between *hitozukuri* and development in this way:

OISCA makes human resource development (*jinzai ikusei*) its pillar. In addition to improving the knowledge and skills of each trainee, OISCA aims to expand its activities in nearby areas and contribute to the development of that region as a whole through that person. [OISCA 2010a: 12]

In the official OISCA discourse of the last decade, context had been brought in, but the person still remains as the fundamental entry point to aid intervention.

Yet, even though the person is still the site of transformation in OISCA, it is not the unmoored empty vessel that was the general conceptualization before the 1990s. On the contrary, international aid through *hitozukuri* in OISCA increasingly demanded staff and trainees, Japanese and Burmese actors, to contend with different relational, cultural, and historical attachments in more explicit ways that could not be ignored even in the official discourses of the magazines. The work of OISCA still constructed a black box between the “person” and “context,” but there was an increasing demand to foreground cultural and historical differences in OISCA, which resonated with recent trends to focus more on “context” in international aid in Japan and elsewhere.

Thus, the gradual shift to take “context” and difference into account more openly in OISCA resonated with the changes in conceptualizations of aid, and in particular of *hitozukuri* aid work, in wider Japanese official aid discourses. The term *hitozukuri* became central to the Japanese government’s aid policies in 1979, when former Prime

Minister Masayoshi Ōhira gave a speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (Ōhira 1979).<sup>47</sup> He spoke of the fact that Japan had historically emphasized the value of education, making self-reliance (*jijō doryoku*) and the development of human resources (*jinteki shigen*) central to the development of the country. He called this *hitozukuri*, and stated that the nurturing of the “unlimited potential of young people” through technical trainings based on Japan’s recent experiences of modernization was one of the most important tasks in Japanese international aid. He elaborated that *hitozukuri* would be done through the fostering of mutual understanding within a mutually-dependent (*sōgo izon*) global community.

For many years, JICA took on this concept of *hitozukuri* as one of its guiding principles, working under the motto of “Making Persons, Making Nations, Heart-to-Heart Contact” (*Hitozukuri, Kunizukuri, Kokoro no Fureai*). In 1999, JICA published a report outlining the ideas behind *hitozukuri*, and in it is mentioned the neoliberal notion of “human capital” as a possible translation of *hitozukuri* into international concepts (JICA 1999).<sup>48</sup> However, it should be noted that the notion of *hitozukuri* that epitomized much of JICA’s work was never the same as neoliberal individualist notions of human capital theory (Dean 2010[1999]; Feher 2009; Foucault 2008). Two JICA officials explain that *hitozukuri* is “a concept unique to Japan” defined as activities aimed “to develop and transfer knowledge, technology and know-how, which are appropriate for the needs of development fields, by fostering mutual understanding with engineers and administrative officials of the recipient country, who work in a situation where culture, history, and values are different from those of Japan” (Kanda and Kuwajima 2006: 38).

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<sup>47</sup> *Hitozukuri* is a term that has been used widely in other sectors of Japanese society, such as by Toyota, local governments, and schools, for example.

<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, echoing Ōhira’s speech and this JICA report, Foucault also cites analyses of human capital to tell us how countries like Japan were able to develop in the way that it did since 1930 (Foucault 2008: 232).



As such, although *hitozukuri* does indeed focus on the person as the unit of aid intervention, these JICA officials and others distinguish *hitozukuri* from concepts such as human capital and human resource development in that the Japanese term, in their definition, focuses on “mutual understanding,” respect for local contexts, and exchanges that go beyond technical issues and the making of entrepreneurial neoliberal subjects.

JICA has since shifted its philosophy from *hitozukuri* to “capacity development,” echoing global trends in international aid discourses that reflect a concern for wider societal changes, not only a focus on the person and interpersonal relations as in *hitozukuri*. Over the past fifty years, international aid agencies around the world have largely shifted their philosophies from infrastructural large projects, to strategies of neoliberal economic restructuring as means of national development, to discourses on partnership, ownership, and participation as a way to eradicate poverty, to interventions in the spheres of learning and knowledge. Throughout this trend, albeit in a simplified description, has been an increasing interest in culture, context, and the social realm, evinced in the emphasis on capacity development, for example.<sup>49</sup> The UNDP website explains that “Capacity Development” evolved as a concept and approach to replace the earlier emphasis on training and technical cooperation. It identifies institutional arrangement, leadership, knowledge, and accountability as the four areas of change where “tactical interventions yield significant and lasting gains on

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<sup>49</sup> This resonates with the appearance of the instrumentalization of culture in other professions such as law (Riles 2006a). In this case, it reflects the skewed emphasis on means over ends in development work (Mosse 2005), and the increasing marketization of previously non-economic domains such as culture and social relations (Elyachar 2002).

capacity”.<sup>50</sup> The website shows how the capacity development framework moves away from the focus on individuals to institutions, societies, and cultural contexts, although the definition of “capacity” and its goals are left vague.<sup>51</sup>

In parallel to this international trend, JICA distinguishes capacity development from *hitozukuri*, defining “capacity” as the development of “countries’ capabilities for handling issues (capacity) as an integrated whole at multiple levels—including the individual, organizational, and societal level” (JICA 2008: 15). JICA further defines capacity as constituted through a combination of “technical capacity,” such as knowledge and skills, and “core capacity” that include management skills and “the will and attitude and leadership that influence the behavior of individuals and organizations” to initiate transformations (JICA 2008: 17). JICA also emphasizes the importance of intervening on the various levels of policy frameworks, legal systems, political and economic institutions, and cultural contexts that enable the development of capabilities (JICA 2008: 18).

OISCA’s shift in discourse from a focus on the person to an attention to contextual factors seemed to resonate with these changes in other aid philosophies.

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<sup>50</sup> UNDP, Capacity Development, “Drivers of Change,” [http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/capacitybuilding/drivers\\_of\\_change/](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/capacitybuilding/drivers_of_change/), accessed on May 11, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> The emphasis on “local context” and organizational capacities existed in the earlier concept of “capacity building” (Kaplan 1999). Leanne Black (2003) gives a useful overview of what capacity building has meant in development work, although the concept has always been infamously ambiguous. She writes that the literature on capacity building outlines the following (Black 2003: 117):

- The multi dimensional focus of capacity building, integrating macro-to micro-level dynamics as a necessary response to the systemic nature of society and change.
- The interplay between “soft” (motivational and process) and “hard” (technical) elements of capacity (Land 1999), as having significant bearing on the efficacy of development initiatives.
- The need to create and strengthen intra- and inter-sectoral partnerships as part of a systemic approach to development.

One can see from this summary that capacity building is far from being only about trainings or focusing on persons.

Nevertheless, the term *hitozukuri* as well as the emphasis on the person continued to persist among Japanese staff and supporters, and rarely did I hear them use the English terms “capacity building” or “capacity development” as found in JICA. What did seem to appear more saliently in recent years in OISCA was the awareness of having to contend with cultural, social, and other differences among staff and trainees from different backgrounds. I suggest that this was different from the emphasis on “local contexts”; rather, it was an attentiveness to relationships among staff and trainees in which different assertions of “context” came in contact with one another, demanding all actors to contend with those differences. The issue was not to embed the aid activity in a particular framing “context,” but to gauge what differences due to inter-contextual interactions needed to be accepted and which needed to be changed. That, I suggest, is the mechanism of what I mean by “contextualization.”

At the same time, this negotiation of differences in OISCA continued to be conceptualized through the means of “the person.” In this formulation, what was foregrounded was the tension between expectations of generalization in focusing on the person—that the negotiations of difference and the processes of change occurring in each staff and trainee would be replicated in other places, on other scales—and the demands to take differences into account in actual relationships. Leading-by-example, in this sense, was a mode of relationality that placed the dynamic between replicability and creativity, the aspirations of simulation and the multiplication of differences, at the heart of the aspirations for generalization in *hitozukuri* aid work.

## **Japanese Models**

In his 1979 speech, Ōhira spoke of the importance of *hitozukuri* in international aid based on Japan’s own history of development in which the cultivation of the

country's human resources had been crucial. Even decades after Ōhira's speech, the government continues to mention the importance of Japan's past experiences in its explanations of aid policies. For example, a summary of the past fifty years of Japanese ODA published in 2004 mentions the fact that Japan's emphasis on *hitozukuri* and the making of countries (*kunizukuri*) derives from its postwar experience as a developing country itself (MOFA 2004). The 2003 new ODA charter also highlights the value of "taking advantage of Japan's experience as the first nation in Asia to become a developed country" in order to formulate Japan's aid activities (MOFA 2003: 1). Similarly, JICA's reasoning for conducting training programs in Japan is based on the belief that "Japanese experiences" and "Japanese ways" can provide models from which actors from other countries can mold their own plans of development. It states:

As the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words." By actually putting oneself in Japanese society and organizations, sharing struggles, and understanding the social conditions and values behind Japanese things, truly important messages can be communicated to people from developing countries who live in very different conditions... The training programs can be an effective way to communicate Japan's unique experience, and we expect that it will play an important role in Japan's international cooperation efforts in the future. [JICA N.d.]

Japan's past experiences are thus formulated as a model, which other countries can emulate or at least see as an example from which they could learn (see also chapter two). It should be noted that this is not described as something that Japanese aid actors explicitly impose on other countries, but rather as values that aid recipients come to "adopt naturally."

The idea that Japan could serve as a model of development was embraced by OISCA's first Japanese staff members, and it was indeed a discourse that still circulated in different forms in OISCA today. An article from 1968, featuring a trainee from India, gives a sense of what this might have meant:

This young man is training hard, thinking of his parents' expectations and dreaming of his country's future, but it is our hope that his learning is not confined to technical skills. We hope that he learns the *kokoro* of Japan. Japan's economic recovery in the 20 years since the end of the war (although even now we cannot say that it has completely recovered) is due to the Japanese people's hard working attitude, but also to the quick turn-around of their *kokoro* from the shock of losing the war to reconstruction efforts. In a society such as India that has many restrictions, what is most needed is flexibility. The Japanese *kokoro* has that. [OISCA 1968b: 15]

In this manner, the notion of *kokoro* was invoked as a kind of national character and essence that enabled Japan's rapid development after the war, and a quality that trainees from other countries could emulate in order to inspire the development of their own countries. This discourse persists decades later, as we find, for instance, the current Secretary General of OISCA write in an essay that since the 1960s trainees from all over the world have come to OISCA to learn, not only the skills but also the *kokoro* of Japanese people (Nagaishi 2010: 10).

Similarly, Sakurai echoed this idea that Japan and Japanese things—and OISCA as an embodiment of this—could serve as an instructive model for Burmese people, although it was not without some qualifications. In early September, a group of female Japanese university students visited the OISCA Myanmar training center for about a week. Everyone at the training center, including myself, invested a significant amount of time to prepare for their arrival and to make their stay as interesting as possible, packing their schedule with various activities from visits to villages to games at night with the Burmese trainees. One of these activities was to help the staff and trainees take care of the pigs for one afternoon. The Myanmar training center had over forty pigs in addition to piglets when I was there, and they were housed in their own building across the street from the living quarters. The structure was quite impressive with sturdy brick walls and concrete floors, and a separate building for birthing mother-pigs and

newborn piglets. The two trainees in charge of the piggery for that week were required to live in this building alongside the pigs because they required constant care and attention. At a later date, the staff in charge of the piggery activities, Ko Maung (introduced in chapter two), explained to me that the pigs' excrement was one of the most important products for the training center. Kawaguchi had started the piggery project in order to secure swine manure for the organic agricultural activities (he began the poultry project for the same reason). He put Ko Maung in charge of the project from the beginning, and sent him to study at a piggery farm in Japan. As I elaborate further below, over the years, Ko Maung had extensively studied piggery techniques on his own and was now in charge of a highly sophisticated system. He told me that the manure was pushed to the back of each corral everyday in order to be mixed with rice husks, and once or twice a month they added the effective microorganism (EM) solution to disinfect the manure and remove the smell.<sup>52</sup> After six months, the mixture was taken out to the rice paddies and vegetable fields. Ko Maung asked me, "It doesn't smell, right?" Indeed, standing in the middle of the piggery facility, surrounded by pigs, I could barely detect the smell of excrement (personal communication, September 30, 2010).

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<sup>52</sup> Effective Microorganisms (EM) was developed as a technology and coined by Professor Teruo Higa from the University of the Ryukyus in Okinawa. As the EM Research Organization, Inc. (EMRO) explains, EM is made of lactic acid bacteria, yeast, and phototrophic bacteria which exist in places such as rice fields and lakes. The EMRO website states: "EM™ has no adverse effects on and is beneficial to plants, animals, and humans. Very simply put, EM™ lives off our waste while we live off 'their waste'" (EMRO N.d.).



Figure 19: Pigs and piglets at the OISCA Myanmar training center.

The Japanese university students had helped the staff and trainees shovel the swine manure to the trough at the back of the corrals, a task that was not difficult given that the floor was made of smooth concrete and they simply had to slide it back. Yet, during an evening discussion session with Sakurai, many of these Japanese students seemed to have been disturbed by the experience. Specifically, they were alarmed at the fact that the Burmese staff and trainees worked with the swine manure in their flip flops, which the students found to be unhygienic. I almost pointed out to them that the Burmese staff and trainees might have been wearing flip flops, but they walked carefully around the trough, never putting their feet into the manure. Sakurai listened to them patiently, but in the end intervened that this was in fact far more hygienic than the way villagers work with livestock in Burma/Myanmar. “As you saw,” he said, “in villages people live with the pigs, so just raising the animals in separate buildings is in itself an improvement.” The students nodded. I asked if the villagers seemed to accept

OISCA's methods, given that it was quite different from theirs. The conversation turned into a discussion about the importance of grasping villagers' needs and responding to their requests.

This interaction must have stayed in Sakurai's mind. Later that evening, as we sat chatting for a while after the Japanese students had gone to bed, he told me that OISCA Myanmar functions as a "model farm," and as such, he suggested that it was not a problem that the training center did not reflect the realities of the villages. "But," he continued, "it is not about imposing Japanese ways of doing things onto Burmese people, but rather about showing Japan—at least a Japan of some time past—so that the people of Asia can take it as a model to take hints from." He gave the examples of the former president of Taiwan, Lee Teng-hui, who had studied in Japan, and the former prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, whose Look East Policy pointed to Japan as a model of development, rather than Western nations. According to Sakurai, both Asian leaders saw Japan as a model from which to draw on but not copy exactly. This was the form of replication that Sakurai seemed to hope for in presenting OISCA and its "Japanese ways" as a model for Burmese people (personal communication, September 10, 2010).

The discussion with the Japanese university students and Sakurai's explanation of his views on Japan and OISCA as a model were the beginnings of conversations that could have addressed the issue of contending with differences, a challenge inherent in the work of simulative practices such as leading-by-example. Indeed, far more than in the official discourses presented in the OISCA magazines, these interactions showed the subtle negotiations that had to occur between "the model" and that which simulates in actual aid activities. However, these exchanges did not go so far. The assumption



ultimately remained that “Japan” or Japanese methods were the models against which Burmese practices would be measured.

Predictably, however, positing Japan as “the model” of development was a fraught issue in the eyes of Burmese staff. Ko Naing, whom I introduced in chapter three, was one of the most senior staff at the Myanmar training center and seemed to have thought quite a bit about the direction of the training center and his work there. He was from the same cohort as Ko Maung and Ko Thein, mentioned in chapter two—they had all been at OISCA since 1998. Ko Naing had come to OISCA as a trainee through the suggestion of his uncle who worked for the Myanmar Agriculture Service (MAS). He told me that during his year as a trainee, they did not spend much time doing actual agricultural work because the soil in the area was still hard and infertile; they spent most of their time leveling the ground, making infrastructural things, and trying to improve the land. In 2000 he had the chance to spend a year at one of the training centers in Japan, and in 2001 became a staff at the Myanmar training center. I asked him what had changed the most at the training center. He told me that, in the beginning, it was very difficult working at the training center because the villagers around them did not understand what OISCA was doing. “They would see OISCA people working the fields at 2 p.m., for example, when it’s still too hot for local people to go back to work from their lunch break, and they would laugh at us,” he said. Despite these challenges, he decided to stay: “Seeing Japanese people come here [to Burma/Myanmar] doing things for our country, it made me feel that we also need to work for this same purpose [of development] as Burmese people.” He was also deeply committed to transmitting what he had learned in OISCA to younger people, that is, the younger staff and trainees, because he believed that these were things that they could not learn in school. He explained:

In the beginning, I didn't really understand how to use my time or work properly, but now I know. I realized that, in order to develop, you need to change yourself, your family, your village, your region, your country. For that, things like time management are important. It's about doing things with others, not just by yourself. Some people are content with just their own lives, but you can only be truly happy if others around you also develop, right? [Personal communication, October 1, 2010]

It seemed that the emphasis on discipline such as punctuality, which Japanese staff had impressed upon me as an important lesson of the training programs, as I explained in chapter one, had been absorbed thoroughly by Ko Naing.

I then asked him if he thought that the OISCA in Japan and the OISCA in Burma/Myanmar were connected. He nodded, but stressed:

But Japan is Japan, and Myanmar has Myanmar culture. If our ways of thinking here are completely different from those of the villagers in the area, it's not going to work. It's about incorporating what's good about Japan into Myanmar, but not about doing everything like Japan. It's not about doing things in a Japanese style here just because there are Japanese people here. Just as in Japan the staff tell trainees that they should do things in Japanese ways because they are in Japan, here things should be done in Burmese ways because this is Myanmar. If you just copy everything in the way that outside people do it, the country will be destroyed. You have to do things according to that country, that culture, just as we have to bring about democracy in our own ways. [Personal communication, October 1, 2010]

In this statement, Ko Naing expressed very clearly the issue at hand in OISCA's approaches to aid work, and the pedagogy of leading-by-example as an aspiration for generalization in particular. That is, he articulated the challenge of discerning the difference between copying a model and learning from it, imposing a pattern and enabling the multiplication of creative difference within a particular form. What he raised was also the question of the stability of "the model" itself. He concluded, "OISCA also needs to develop; if one doesn't develop, one can't help other people, right?"

In a similar vein, Ko Thein also expressed a sense of resistance to the idea of simply copying Japanese approaches. He was also one of the senior staff, but if Ko Naing was a rather boisterous man full of confidence, Ko Thein was a more quiet presence. Nevertheless, in his silence he seemed to command a considerable degree of respect from the other staff and trainees. One day, as we watched staff, trainees, and laborers from the village work in the rice paddies of the Myanmar training center, Ko Thein pointed out how everyone was talking and singing as they worked. Indeed, I could also hear laughter. He told me that the ways that people work in Burma/Myanmar and Japan are different. “Here,” he explained, “people work while having fun. At the training centers in Japan, you were not allowed to sing, or even talk,” he said. You could say something if it was a question about the work at hand, but anything unrelated to the task or to agriculture was prohibited. He explained that in Burma/Myanmar there were songs for the various agricultural tasks too, such as songs for rice planting, songs about the landscape, and so on. “People have fun *and* they get the work done,” he said. “And it feels good” (personal communication, September 14, 2010). Traditionally, farmers in Japan also have songs that go along with agricultural work, but OISCA’s approach did not. It was OISCA’s particular idea of what “Japanese methods” meant, and this staff could see that Burmese staff and trainees did not need to adopt the seriousness in work in order to learn from OISCA.

Although leading-by-example was a principle that OISCA staff told me explicitly, these issues that Ko Naing and Ko Thein raised about simulation also emerged in my conversations with Japanese aid workers from other organizations. In fact, they were more explicit in verbalizing the challenge of negotiating “models” with contextual differences in aid work. In short, the Japanese aid workers with whom I spoke seemed to understand the need to change “the model” according to context. A

few months after I left the OISCA project site, I visited another Japanese NGO working in Burma/Myanmar, called the Terra People's Association (TPA). I was curious about TPA not only because it was the only other agricultural Japanese NGO in Burma/Myanmar, but also because a former OISCA staff from the Myanmar training center was now working there, Matsuno. I was curious to hear her views on the differences and similarities between the two organizations.

In one of their projects, TPA had established a settlement of ten families, who had previously been landless farmers. They were mostly from nearby villages and so many of them knew each other before moving to the settlement. Each family was given three acres of farmland, as well as access to communal farms on the peripheries of the settlement where they could experiment with different techniques and crops. TPA also provided them with initial funds to build their houses and establish their new lives. The settlement was supposed to function as a model community and model farm for surrounding villagers in order to stimulate the adoption of new organic agricultural techniques, and disseminate values such as environmental consciousness.



Figure 20: TPA settlement.

Matsuno took me to the settlement and gave me an opportunity to speak with the villagers there. One of the men, who seemed to occupy a leadership role in the community, explained that the best things about coming to the settlement was that they learned about organic farming, they could purchase pigs and anything else that they might want for their agricultural activities, and most of all, they now had their own farmlands, water, and electricity. “But,” he said, “this is a model community so we want to keep it lush all the time, which is sometimes difficult because the weather is not always good.” I asked them how they were working toward becoming a model community. He answered that the settlement inhabitants tried to show the villagers around them how farming can be improved by using organic material such as bokashi fertilizer, how they can grow long-term crops such as avocado and coffee, and how they can grow their own vegetables in their home gardens during the rainy season to improve their food safety. I asked him if they had been able to change any of the people

in the surrounding villages. He told me that many of the people who came to see the settlement wanted to buy the bokashi fertilizer at the end of their visits. He added, “Other people come to see our piggery methods... They see that here we put EM and other organic matter on the floors of our pigpens. We then mix this with swine manure and use it for the garlic fields, and it works very well. Visitors see this and many of them want to buy the organic fertilizer that has been mixed with our swine manure” (personal communication, March 22, 2011).

Later, Matsuno explained to me that the piggery methods used in their projects were kept as “natural” as possible. Thus, for example, they did not interfere with birthing, unlike at OISCA where mother-pigs were cared for in separate rooms before giving birth. The only intervention they taught in the birthing process at TPA was to separate the piglets from the mothers because sometimes the mother-pigs panicked and trampled or bit the piglets to death.

Indeed, when Ko Maung explained and showed me the piggery project at the OISCA Myanmar training center, I had been impressed. In this impressiveness, however, there did seem to be the challenge of replicability for villagers, an issue that Burmese staff seemed to be aware of. For example, even in terms of the food for the pigs, there appeared to be difficulties in asking villagers to adopt OISCA’s methods. Ko Maung explained to me that the feed for the forty-four adult pigs for a five-day period consisted of 100 kilograms of rice bran, 40 kilograms of oil scraps, 10 kilograms of fish meal, 200 kilograms of raw corn, and 10 to 15 kilograms of charcoal made from rice husks (*kuntan*). They fed this mixture to the pigs four times a day, about two kilograms per pig in one day. In contrast, villagers usually gave scraps of food and weed to the pigs. I asked Ko Maung what the difference in costs would be between the OISCA recipe and the villagers’ feed, and I was surprised to hear that the former cost only 350

to 400 kyats per day (about 35 to 40 U.S. cents) in comparison to the latter's expense of about 200 to 300 kyats per day (about 20 to 30 U.S. cents). This was not a significant difference, even taking into account villagers' limited incomes. "But the problem is that villagers can't get ingredients very easily, such as crushed up corn—they don't have the large machines to crush them into powder like at the training center," he explained.

One interesting recent development, however, was that Ko Maung had started experimenting with a method that he learned from villagers: he saw that they gave nursing mother-pigs broken rice and raw trash from their kitchens mixed with water, oil scraps, and rice bran, which seemed to boost the growth of their piglets, so he was trying this out at the training center (personal communication, September 30, 2010).

Such experimental initiatives notwithstanding, the general approach of the piggery project at OISCA was that it did not need to be exactly replicable by villagers. As Sakurai had suggested, being a "model farm" meant something else in OISCA.

Matsuno from TPA seemed to disagree with this perspective. When I mentioned to her that some American aid workers in Burma/Myanmar had mentioned to me their doubts about model farms, she told me that she had heard some villagers as well as trainees say that OISCA can do what it does because it has money—this apparently dissuaded them from trying to take up OISCA's methods in their own communities.

"This defeats the purpose of being a model farm," she said, "so at TPA, for example, we make the pigpens as locally-made as possible, not using concrete or other inaccessible materials like at OISCA's piggery facilities" (personal communication, March 22, 2011).



Figure 21: Piggery at the TPA settlement.

This issue of how to gauge the degree of difference between “the model” and the objects of aid in leading-by-example, or development-as-simulation, was echoed in the words of a JICA official in Burma/Myanmar as well. In short, the official whom I call Arai, offered four dynamics at play in the use of “models” in agricultural aid work. First, he explained that the use of “model farms” could be an effective way to show evidence (*jisshō*) that new techniques work, especially given that farmers often have an ingrained mistrust of outside technologies. He told me that although it might take several years, what was certain was that “the spread of techniques cannot exist without evidence (*jisshō naki gijutsu no hakyū wa arienai*).” Second, he agreed that at times there was the dilemma of making a model replicable to farmers, even if they were proven to work in the model farm. An agricultural aid worker always had to balance the need to



show techniques that regular farmers in a particular area could do themselves, and the concern as a technical expert that one could not fail in their agricultural work, such as the failure to produce a high yield of crops. He explained that there was always that tension between making something replicable and achieving a technically sophisticated success, between accessibility and aiming for the highest technical standard possible. Relatedly, he suggested that the third element in “model farms” might be the necessity to create “cracks” (*sukima*) for simulation. In other words, he believed that the techniques shown and proven in the model farms could not be so perfect and extraordinary that people other than the agricultural aid technician would not be able to participate or challenge. “Otherwise,” he cautioned, “it will just end in ‘wow, that’s impressive!’ (*uwa, sugoine!*).” Lastly, he told me: “There is an element of fickleness (*kimagure*) in agricultural extension work and model farms—people will be more or less predisposed to accepting new things depending on whether or not their hearts are moved, which also rests on the character and personal appeal of the aid worker” (personal communication, April 7, 2011). Except for the first factor of evidentiary value, his explanation of the issues surrounding model farms rested on the importance of uncertainty and ambiguity. In particular, Arai indicated that simulative practices were also about approximation—replicability rested on determining the appropriate degree of difference so that the model was both an ideal that was more than that which simulated it *and* a replicable example that was not too far removed. In this sense, drawing on Arai’s theorization of model farms, I suggest that “the model” in simulative approaches such as leading-by-example could not just be anything, nor could it remain in its original form. It had to navigate the ambiguous terrain between its ideal form and its transformed state in light of its relationship with those who simulated it.

### **“Far, OK, Near, Not Good”**

If leading-by-example seemed to be an instrument asserting “Japan” as the model of development as described at the beginning of this chapter, it could also come undone. This was driven home to me when I saw that some of the Japanese staff at the training centers in Japan spoke a strange kind of Japanese in their effort to try to communicate with trainees from around the world. Although trainees focused on learning Japanese language during the first month or two of their year-long training courses, evidently this was not enough time for them to become fluent (although it was incredible how good their Japanese was by the end of the year). Therefore, staff spoke to them in Japanese but often in a strange pidgin-like form, which inevitably trainees emulated. The Japanese staff seemed to think that this way of speaking would be easier for trainees to understand and use. Honda at one of the training centers in Japan was a prime example. One day, I attended his classroom lecture on pruning trees. It was in Japanese, but from time to time, he used pidgin phrases such as “far, OK, near, not good (*tōi daijōbu kedo chikai dame*),” “if it’s too close become to be dark” (*chikai to kurai narimasu*). He also used the English term for random words, rendered into Japanese *katakana* pronunciation, such as “sunlight” (as in, *sunlaito wa daiji desu*), “two months” (*tsūmansu*), “next year” (*nekusuto iyā*), and “insect” (*insekuto*) (personal communication, January 28, 2010). In Japanese, certain English words are used in *katakana* form, but these were not the usual set of terms.

If the Japanese staff were supposed to be the first instance of the Japanese model that local staff and trainees should emulate, these trends seemed to challenge that. Thus, it was ironically the pedagogy of leading-by-example itself that destabilized the “Japan” that OISCA posited as the model. Firstly, as I describe in chapter two, when Japanese staff spoke about Japan being the model of development, they tended to point

to a nostalgic notion of it that remained elusive, never quite clear if it ever existed in the first place. This was in a way a process of self-simulation in that the notion of the Japanese self was assembled from a desire to appear in the image of an imagined past “Japan.” Thus, the Japanese “model” of the morning disciplinary routines, for example, were themselves simulations of an imagined “Japanese way” inherited from the past that were ambivalently subject to both remembrance and forgetting. On the one hand were those Japanese staff who aspired to that idealized view of Japan, such as Sakurai who qualified his statement about Japan being the model for other Asian countries by saying that he was referring to a Japan of times past. On the other hand, however, Sakurai himself was aware of the pastness of this “Japaneseness,” and as such, the instability and even fiction of this “model.”

These moments of uncertainty were not lost on the trainees or non-Japanese staff. In these instances, the ambivalence did not encourage simulation as “cracks,” but rather challenged the validity of the model itself. For example, as we saw with Ko Naing, many of them voiced their concerns or skepticism about imitating Japanese ways of doing things exactly as they were presented to them. For instance, in the same lecture on pruning mentioned above, a number of trainees asked Honda questions about how to apply the lesson to their own countries. One man from Tajikistan raised his hand and stated that, in his country, when people cut a branch in the middle with a chainsaw, the remaining branch dies, but when they cut it with an ax, it does not. Honda replied that in Japan people would never cut branches with either a chainsaw or an ax, but that both ways would probably cause the branch to die if it was cut in the middle rather than at its base. The trainee, however, insisted that in Tajikistan he had seen this many times and it was true. Honda also kept repeating that in Japan they would never do this and it did not make sense.

Later on in the same class, a trainee from India asked how mango trees should be pruned since the fruits grow on the tips of branches. After some thinking, Honda replied that it was not a problem to cut back the branches. He then moved on to other topics. But after a short break, Honda returned to this trainee's question and conceded that in all honesty he could not give a good answer since there were no mango trees in Japan. For example, he explained that in Japan the common practice was to cut branches in order to let in as much sunlight as possible, but that in the trainees' countries they probably needed to control the shadows as well, because the sunlight in their tropical environments can be harmful. He gave the example of when he was in Papua New Guinea: he pruned the trees in the coffee plantation according to what he knew from Japan, but the strong sunlight ended up burning the coffee leaves. "So," he said, "I can't give you a good answer" (personal communication, January 28, 2010).

Although Honda ultimately agreed that Japanese approaches did not always apply to other countries, there was clearly a struggle between maintaining Japan as a model and accepting the possibility that it may or should not be imitated. Japanese staff at the training centers often told me that the goal was not to make exact copies of Japan or OISCA's approaches, but to encourage people from other countries to figure out their own methods using Japan and OISCA simply as a reference. Nevertheless, there was always a tension between copying and difference in the aspirations for generalization in *hitozukuri* aid work, and the claims of not knowing and expressions of ambivalence such as those of Honda paradoxically seemed to constitute his very expertise as someone who was aware of the difficulty of answering such questions. In fact, the awareness of the ambiguity of the model and the existence of contextual differences that impinged on the interaction seemed to create the struggles of the "muddiness" of the field that defined *hitozukuri* aid work for Honda (see chapter three).

Practices of simulation exposed, perhaps counter-intuitively, the seam lines of difference in intercultural and interpersonal relations that could be pulled apart to highlight the struggles between Japanese and Burmese participants in OISCA's training programs. Appearing as a problematic in the eyes of staff and trainees alike, the awareness of these struggles in leading-by-example and the efforts in the "muddiness" to deal with them were another way that aid work was constituted in OISCA.

### **The Sadness of Models**

It should be pointed out that, on the one hand, some trainees did seem to find inspiration in seeing Japan as a model of development. An alumnus from the Philippines explains in an essay that going to Japan for training opened his eyes to the reasons why Japan had been able to develop and the Philippines had not. "I realized that if we work hard (*isshōkenmei*) like the Japanese, it might lead to the development of our country," he writes (OISCA 2002a: 72). An alumnus from the Myanmar training center expressed a similar view when I asked her what she learned from the trainings. She told me that when she was little, she learned in school about Japan's development after the Second World War, and going to OISCA helped her see how this was done in reality. Specifically, she remarked that she learned a lot from the former director, Kawaguchi—his approach to work, his way of thinking, how he tilled the rice paddies. After she learned some Japanese language at the training center, she felt even closer to him and to Japanese people, and wanted to become the same (*sou naritai to omotta*). She added that during her time in Japan, she learned a lot from living with people from different countries as well, and also learned more about how Japan was able to develop after the war (personal communication, November 20, 2010).

On the other hand, however, the work of generalization demanded from participants in simulative acts of leading-by-example and development-as-simulation produced a profound feeling of sadness in those who were expected to simulate the Japanese model. At the Myanmar training center, I spent many hours talking to Burmese staff about their experiences training and working at OISCA. During a lunch break, one Burmese staff explained to me that before going to Japan, he did not really know the situation in his own country. But after he went to Japan for a year and came back, and saw his country with the new knowledge, he realized the extreme condition of poverty and underdevelopment there. He told me that his “*kokoro* was really sad” (*honto ni kokoro ga kanashii*) (personal communication, October 31, 2010). Another staff sitting with us nodded, and agreed that when he arrived in Yangon after a year of training in Japan, as he stepped out of the airport, he “felt really sad” (*won: ne: te*) at the poverty he now saw (personal communication, October 31, 2010). He continued that this was why he felt that he really wanted to—rather, needed to—work for the development of his country. The demands of simulation in the *hitozukuri* activities as the means for transformation and development in OISCA generated such affective responses of sadness, not simply assertions and negotiations of difference. But perhaps it was in these moments of dislocation that difference could appear as such, and leading-by-example could generate creative transformations that spun out and away from “the model,” rather than produce mere copies.

## Conclusion

Many anthropologists have studied the ways that universalisms and particularisms, or claims to them, are articulated alongside each other in constitutions of expertise, co-produced in processes that try to circulate while latching onto stepping

stones along the way (Choy 2005; Fassin and Rechtman 2005; Fortun 2001; Gupta 1998; Hayden 2003; Tsing 2005). In contrast, I have used the term “generalization” to refer to the practices of simulation of leading-by-example in which the question was not about “scaling up” OISCA’s activities, but about repeating patterns that asked aid actors to discern the line between the proliferation of the same forms and replications that multiply differences. The imagination was horizontal rather than vertical, if you will. The aspirations for generalizations in this way were at the center of OISCA’s *hitozukuri* activities, as aid actors imagined community, national, and global changes, in their own ways, through transformations of the person engaged in the rippling effects of simulative practices. There was a deeply held belief among staff and trainees, whether Japanese, Burmese, or others, that if I change alongside you, you can change too; and if we can change alongside each other, we can change the world. Yet, if in one interpretation this “wish ‘to become like you’... seeks to create neither magic nor parody but solidarity” (Ferguson 2002: 561), from another perspective, the simulations also appeared uncomfortably close to arguments of superiority of the Japanese and OISCA model in an uneasy allusion to traces of imperialism and colonialism.

Thus, an important factor of leading-by-example to consider was the existence of ambivalence and uncertainty in the simulative interactions that eschewed predetermined outcomes in light of contextual differences that made the manufacturing of exact replicas impossible. It could not be simply about solidarity or about neocolonial structures. It was the dynamic between “the model” and contextual differences that mobilized the aspirations for generalization, not in smooth chains of causality but rather in stuttering movements. This was, once again, another instance of the centrality of ambivalent struggles, of double-takes and aftershock effects, that defined the experience of aid work for OISCA’s aid actors.

## CHAPTER 5: Aid Work as Debt and Gratitude—*Kye:Zu:, On-Gaeshi,* And Loans

### Introduction

Many of the Burmese staff at the OISCA Myanmar training center had been in OISCA for several years, if not over a decade including their time as trainees, and I found this to be remarkable given the fact that most NGOs around the world suffer from the quick turnover of staff. Ma Khaing had been at OISCA for nearly five years. She was a young staff in her late twenties who became one of my closest confidantes at the training center. She had a warm, comforting demeanor about her, and I could see that the trainees and other staff respected her for that, as well as for her diligence and principled approach to her work. One day, during one of our evening strolls along the road outside the training center that had become our daily exercise, I asked her why she had been at OISCA for so many years. Like many other staff, she told me that she felt *kye:zu:* for the rare opportunity that OISCA gave her of going to Japan, and the chance to become friends with trainees from around the world during that time (personal communication, October 21, 2010).

*Kye:zu:* is part of the expression that means “thank you” in Burmese—*kye:zu: tin ba te*—but the notion of *kye:zu:* as it appeared in OISCA differed from the English connotations of the phrase. In Burma/Myanmar, *kye:zu:* can be used in a variety of contexts to refer to different kinds of relations of debt and gratitude that are not always measured in equal ways. *Kye:zu:* as OISCA’s Burmese staff such as Ma Khaing explained to me pointed to a sense of gratitude and indebtedness that was exceptional.



In conversations with Burmese staff, it appeared that they used *kye:zu:* as an expression of a kind of debt-gratitude toward OISCA that is usually reserved for one's parents or teachers. As I elaborate further below, *kye:zu:* in this sense referred to the fact that what was given had been so great that complete return could never be achieved or even expected. The importance lay in the efforts to repay in gratitude, knowing that it was impossible to conclude this indebtedness with an equal return.

What was notable about this talk of *kye:zu:* was that it resembled a concept that OISCA's Japanese staff and supporters had mentioned to me about their own commitments to OISCA: *on-gaeshi*. As in the Burmese term, *on-gaeshi* refers to a sentiment and value of indebtedness and gratitude that is usually reserved for parents or life-saviors—that is, those to whom one imagines complete return would never be possible. For example, the director of the Myanmar training center, Sakurai, described his commitment to OISCA based on his sentiment of *on-gaeshi*. He told me that he had been fortunate to have extraordinary elders around him when he first joined OISCA at the Shikoku training center. He reminisced how one of the older staff members, now since passed away, would at times suddenly say things that shook him to the core. The man told Sakurai things that he had never heard at home or at school. He and the other older staff also encouraged Sakurai to read books about the early Meiji period, in Sakurai's words, "when Japanese people changed their country on their own, without any models." They told Sakurai to read Ryōtaro Shiba's *Saka No Ue No Kumo* (Clouds Over the Hills), a classic novel in modern Japanese literature published as a series from 1968-1972 that Sakurai had never read before. He explained to me that, in his view, the uniting idea throughout the novel is "optimism" (*oputimizumu*). "These men in the early Meiji period were made fun of (*baka ni sareta*) for trying out new things, but they kept going. They were pioneers (*kaitakusha*). OISCA's first staff, the elderly men I

worked with, were also made fun of but kept going. They were also pioneers.” He continued: “The young Japanese staff in OISCA now don’t have mentors (*onshi*) around them, and so young staff don’t grow because they don’t work with amazing people. I have *on*” (personal communication, November 7, 2010). By stating that he had *on*, he meant that his work was driven by an impetus to give back that *on*: that is, *on-gaeshi* (literally, “*on*-return”) out of a sense of gratitude.

In this chapter, I examine how the modality of indebtedness among OISCA’s aid actors shaped the ways that they understood their professional commitments. Specifically, I argue that aid work was experienced and conceptualized by both Burmese and Japanese aid workers as transformative for oneself and for others in responding to the obligation to return moral and monetary debts. It is probably easy to imagine how recipients of aid are morally and financially indebted in aid projects; it is harder to consider that aid workers themselves might be defined by conditions of indebtedness. In fact, it was indebtedness that turned recipients into workers, that is, trainees into staff, and beneficiaries into leaders of community development. Or so the imagination went.

The construction of the repayment of debts as meaningful and transformative was not stable, however, and it depended on the inherent doubleness of debts. On the one hand, debt-relations are based on unequal relations that can be oppressive for the indebted subject who is caught in the demand to repay, whether materially or immaterially. This is probably not very difficult to acknowledge. On the other hand, debt-relations can be forms of ethical relationality as well. For example, in comparing the concepts of moral debt among Burmese staff, in their idea of *kye:zu:*, and among Japanese staff, in their idea of *on-gaeshi*, we can see how the obligation to return moral debts was framed in a sense of gratitude and as a form of ethical value. This was not

the doubleness of credit and debt in money—the former seen as “good” and the latter seen as “bad”—that Chris Gregory (2012) describes. Rather, *kye:zu:* and *on-gaeshi* pointed to a sense of gratitude and commitment to the obligation to return the moral debt that was seen to be valuable by both Burmese and Japanese staff.

It follows, however, that debt-gratitude also made unequal relations seem ethical and thus outside of criticism. For instance, when Japanese staff framed certain relationships in aid work as *on-gaeshi*—not just between older and younger Japanese staff, but also between local staff or trainees and OISCA—the inequalities and even memories of violence in that relation were erased. I suggest that it was this double-faced quality of debt-gratitude that gave ideas of “aid work” in OISCA their engine. That is, what the comparison allows us to see is how the tension between unequal relations and the ethically formulated relationship of gratitude, and the efforts to maintain indebtedness in the modality of the latter, generated the dynamism that defined “aid work” as a transformative endeavor for many of the Japanese and Burmese aid actors in OISCA. As Holly High (2012) states, a considerable amount of “worry and work... goes into moral reasoning where debt forms one of the constituent threads” (365).

In addition to the moral debts, this chapter also examines the system of monetary debts that existed among Burmese staff and former trainees at the Myanmar training center. I suggest that this form of indebtedness worked differently than the moral debts. The training center had a loan system, one for alumni in order to help them jumpstart agricultural or development projects in their communities, and another scheme for staff, which did not stipulate usage in the same manner as for alumni but was generally used to send money to parents and pay for long-distance university courses. One of Sakurai’s goals as the new director was to systematize the financial

structure of the training center, including the loan schemes. On one level, his methods brought into focus who was involved, and how: OISCA was the creditor and the Burmese staff and alumni were the debtors, obligated to repay the loans at specific points in time. On another level, however, Sakurai seemed to have noticed the organizational aspect of this transaction, and was beginning to reformulate the relationship. In other words, he knew that OISCA was not simply a Japanese organization, but also an entity composed of Burmese aid workers who felt a deep attachment and pride for OISCA, something that I observed as well. He acted upon this fact, and the new loan system asked the staff and alumni, the debtors, to be responsible for each other, hoping to instill a social obligation to each other in a kind of ethics of solidarity. OISCA would no longer appear as the creditor. In this plan, not yet fully realized as of my fieldwork in 2010, there was again a dynamic of double-facedness, this time in monetary debts. If the two forms of debt-gratitude first appeared ethical and aspirational, and the struggle was to obscure the inequalities in those debt-relations, in contrast, the monetary debts seemed constraining at first, and the attempts were to transform them into forms of ethical relationality. This appeared as an explicit effort to blur the distinctions between debts and social obligations, the former redefining all relations (Graeber 2011).

Burmese and Japanese aid workers in OISCA constructed different formulations of aid work as a transformative endeavor in these multiple ways, working out how the obligations to return moral and monetary debts could be construed to be ethical. The challenges to this move differed depending on the degree of informality and formality, the invisibility and explicitness of the creditor and the obligation to repay. As I will illustrate, this expression of ethicality was not always “ethical” in that its performance

also obscured relations of inequality and histories of violence. Ultimately, what I was never able to see were attempts to bypass debt-relations all together.

## **Debts**

In the ideal image of an aid worker in standard accounts, the person is morally and philosophically motivated to help suffering others. There are important distinctions to be made between different types of aid work: human rights, development, or humanitarianism, to name the paradigmatic categories. Despite the differences, typical narratives of development and humanitarian professions, the two relevant domains for this project, generally agree on the idea that the aid worker is ideally an ethical agent compelled by certain universal principles of human sentiment and morality (Barnett and Weiss 2008; Bornstein 2005; Quarles van Ufford and Giri 2003; Redfield 2006; Wilson and Brown 2009). When anthropologists study the compromises, dilemmas, failures, contradictions, politics, and unintended consequences that such aid actors enact and face in their work, these analyses are at their foundation based on the view that the ideal type of aid work is first and foremost defined by the ideals of moral sentiment to help suffering others such as in the values of compassion (Elisha 2008; Fassin 2012; Feldman 2007; Ticktin 2006). One could say that such anthropologists' critiques would not themselves appear as acts of intervention if they did not first presuppose that this was the ideal that they were proving to fail in practice.

Certainly, I am also using this ideal type of the aid actor as the purveyor of moral imperatives as a "straw man" against which I build my argument (Strathern 1981). However, my point is not to decry the failure or deception of this ideal figure in practice, but to draw out the ways that the ideal itself looks different in OISCA. Several anthropologists have studied the different religious conceptualizations of the act of

giving behind humanitarian acts, from *dān* in Hinduism (Bornstein 2012) to *zakat* in Islam (Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan 2003), illustrating how the value of helping others is intricately bound with particular understandings of relational obligations, or the attempts to escape them. In this light, as I illustrated in previous chapters, the ideal type of the aid actor begins to appear as a variable effect of different concepts of social relationality and obligations, rather than an embodiment and guardian of an abstract essence of “humanity.” Therefore, as much as analyses of the politics of governance and subjectification in aid activities provide important sobering observations, an examination of the variety of ways in which aid actors themselves construct the ideal image of an aid actor can contribute to further understandings of aid work as constituted vis-à-vis a diverse set of particular relational ethics. The concern here is not the tension between ideals and practices, but the work and contestations that go into making ideal types, and their effects.

Unlike the anthropological literature on aid work and charity, *dān*, or *zakat*, what I saw was important for both Japanese and Burmese aid actors in OISCA were the different conceptualizations of the ethical obligation to return and repay moral and monetary debts. As such, there was a shared view of aid actors as indebted subjects who were fulfilling the duty to repay in a particular relationship. As Marcel Mauss (1990[1950]) indicated, the giving of gifts also entails the obligation to return and reciprocate, and thus indebtedness is not necessarily outside the circulations of gift exchange. Moreover, his descriptions of the ways that gifts had to be accepted with praise and appreciation among the Kwakiutl speak to the ways that the obligation to accept and reciprocate has to be accompanied by expressions of feeling such as gratitude (Mauss 1990[1950]: 41; see also Appadurai 1985). As much as the gifts contained parts of the person of the giver, the acts and objects of return were also

invested with parts of the person of the receiver / reciprocator, instigating further reproductions of exchange relations. Thus, theories of gift exchange show us that the obligation to reciprocate can be the motivation for forms of social action that are imbued with moral significance, as we see in OISCA. This is standard in anthropological understandings of the gift.

However, what made the idea of moral and monetary indebtedness among OISCA's aid actors different from those in gift exchange was that there was no reciprocity *per se*, although I do contend that it was a form of exchange and circulation. What mattered for the conceptualization of the aid worker was the obligation to return and repay, without expectations of fulfillment or another re-gifting. Several anthropologists and theorists after Mauss have argued that gift exchange is in fact always inextricably linked to the idea of the "pure gift," as impossible as it might be, or to manipulations and processes of time which play with the temporal ambiguity, and hence the potential incompleteness, of the obligations of reciprocity (Bourdieu 1977; Derrida 1992; Laidlaw 2000; Miyazaki 2004; Parry 1986; Weiner 1980). But the lack of reciprocity in OISCA's case was not of this kind. On the one hand, the moral debts of *kye:zu:* and *on-gaeshi* were seen as acts of return that could never be completed, but they were understood as responses in the obligation to repay. In this sense, I suggest that the moral debt-relations in OISCA were extreme versions of the gift's mirror image; that is, this was not about a "pure gift" but a kind of "pure return," in which actors repaid moral debts without calculations of equivalence, knowing that the acts of return could never match the magnitude of what was given.

While Mauss described such conditions in which the recipient is unable to repay as "slavery" (Mauss 1990[1950]: 42), analyses of spiritual and moral debt such as in Buddhist contexts indicate that situations of constant moral indebtedness can be

meaningful as well. For example, the recognition in Buddhist cosmologies that one must not reciprocate in kind to acts of meritorious giving or cannot reciprocate fully to the dead constitutes states of indebtedness as part of certain moral relations (Jellema 2005; Langford 2009). Within these relations, debtors see expressions of gratitude to be paramount in making the acts of return meaningful as fulfillments of their sense of moral responsibility. Below I will examine in more detail how *kye:zu:* and other similar conceptualizations of moral-material exchange relate to each other. One must remark, however, that Mauss's conception was based on material exchanges, unlike *kye:zu:*. The thing and the "spirit" of the gift are inseparable in Mauss's study, and *kye:zu:* raises the question of what happens when the core of the act of return is understood to be non-material.

On the other hand, the monetary debts in the current loan system at the OISCA Myanmar training center were also *not* considered to be forms of gift exchange by either Japanese or Burmese aid actors. As I elaborate further below, Sakurai made sure that this misunderstanding would not happen by instituting a greater systematization of loans than during the reign of the previous director, Kawaguchi. As a number of scholars have shown, debts such as through World Bank schemes and microfinance projects have become a dominant approach in development aid. These uses of debt are indicative of rising forms of "empowerment through dispossession" (Elyachar 2005), and the subjectification of people, especially women, through the "economy of shame" in the furtherance of capitalist goals (Karim 2008, 2011), that fall into a wider trend of neoliberalization in which persons are defined and instrumentalized in the service of the market economy. In Burma/Myanmar, it is not the market economy that has instituted systems of debt in the country, but new initiatives such as microfinance projects by foreign aid agencies do seem to extend rather than address existing



conditions of indebtedness among the poor (Ash Center 2011; WFP 2009).<sup>53</sup> In other words, one could suppose that the new strategies to offer better forms of credit by aid organizations and local banks that are beginning to appear in the country replace one system of indebtedness with another. One can certainly see OISCA's loan schemes in this context, interpreting the debts as ways in which staff and alumni are being incorporated into a relationship with OISCA that bypasses their local communities, families, and government.

If I am calling *kye:zu:*, *on-gaeshi*, and loans as different forms of "debt" rather than gift exchange, how is it possible to speak of these relations, and their generative ideas of aid work, in terms of ethics? As Gustav Peebles explains, the commonsense view is that credit is power and good, and debt is weakness and bad (Peebles 2010: 226). However, he points out how anthropologists have shown that credit and debt are in fact mutually constitutive and inseparable, to the point that at times their hierarchical relationship and attributions are not what we expect. For example, Janet Roitman (2005) offers a rich ethnographic account of the ways that "sanctioned" and "unsanctioned" wealth in Cameroon are products of forms of debt that enable certain kinds of sociality and not others among Cameroonians of different generations. As such, Peebles argues that the ethnographic task is "to study how the credit/debt nexus is productive of social ties, allegiances, enmities, and hostilities, rather than to make normative pronouncements concerning whether credit is liberating and debt is debilitation" (Peebles 2010: 234). He himself sees gift exchange as the primary example of the credit/debt dyad and draws inspiration from Mauss and others to propose that ethnographies of credit/debt would

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<sup>53</sup> Many rural Burmese take out loans from rich men in their communities and other informal local resources, which tend to demand high interest rates. The necessity of loans to meet basic daily needs such as food is great, making loans a "continuous coping strategy" for many rural poor (WFP 2009: 18).

benefit from considering its moral tensions together with its material effects. It is in this spirit, for instance, that Clara Han (2004), in her account of a particular family in Chile, describes how the entanglement of monetary and affective indebtedness can tie people and memories together, but only as moments of disarticulation from their traumatic and painful present. Debts were both enabling of social and temporal relations, as well as expressions of one's marginality in a world of dispossession.

The moral tensions in debts appear clearly in this chapter. In many ways, the commonsense account of creditors having power over debtors and the critiques of debt in aid—that is, OISCA as dominated by Japanese staff having authority over local actors—seem to fit this case. Nevertheless, the Burmese staff's insistence on the importance of *kye:zu:* indicated that indebtedness was not simply subjugation, but also a means for ethical transformation for them. Even the monetary loans were difficult to criticize outright, which would mean ignoring how Burmese staff found meaning in beginning to manage these loan schemes for themselves. Monetary debts in small scales also seemed to form an important part of people's relationships with each other, something that I came to realize in my own exclusion from these relations. What was interesting to me were the different ways that Sakurai and Burmese staff understood debts, and how they envisioned such debts to articulate social relations in contrasting ways.

It is important to note that a crucial characteristic of the moral and monetary debts in OISCA was that these were binds forged in proximate relations, not between unknown social actors or mediated by anonymous systems and institutions. Even the factor of money in this case was not a currency connecting "indifferent" others to an "abstract whole," although Sakurai was trying to shape social relations in particular ways through the systematization of loans (Simmel 1978: 301). The debts unfolded in

the fabric of interpersonal and intercultural relations that were invested with personal commitments, and as such, the analysis of debts in OISCA cannot be divorced from the dynamics of the “muddiness” of relations in “the field” (see chapter three). It is in this context that Japanese and Burmese aid actors engaged in debt-relations as ethical endeavors that were both obligatory and aspirational for themselves and others. As I have described in previous chapters, understandings of aid work in OISCA were formulated in aid actors’ daily struggles in intimate relations with difference, incomprehension, and anachronism, for example, which created moments of struggle and ambivalence. The doubleness of moral and monetary debts also constituted such a situation in which normative pronouncements about the effects of debts could not be made, and the indeterminacy itself was a valuable condition for Japanese and Burmese aid actors to try to envision different understandings of aid work for themselves and each other in the framework of their everyday interactions. Even though, strictly speaking, *kye:zu:*, *on-gaeshi*, and loans worked in separate registers, there were moments of contact and spaces of reverberation in which aid actors had to contend with these different obligations to repay, whether as demands on oneself or on others, and these struggles were themselves generative of the aspiring relations that defined aid work.

### **The Grateful Debt: *Kye:zu:***

Ma Khaing was not the only Burmese staff who told me that the reasons for staying in OISCA were based on a sense of *kye:zu:*. Most of the Burmese staff with whom I spoke described the *kye:zu:* that they felt for OISCA as a sentiment and act of gratitude that was valuable because of its abundant and incalculable character. Ma Phyto was another staff who joined Ma Khaing and me on our evening walks. Since the Myanmar training center was run as a joint project by OISCA and the Myanmar

Agriculture Service (MAS), MAS sometimes sent staff to work at the OISCA training center. An MAS staff, a woman in her forties whom I call Ma Chit, had been there for over a decade, and Ma Phyo was the most recent MAS employee to be sent to work at the training center.<sup>54</sup>

Ma Phyo had spent her first year at OISCA at a training center in Japan, where I first met her, and when I continued my fieldwork at the Myanmar training center, we found each other again. In addition to Ma Khaing, she became one of my closest friends there. While Ma Khaing was a motherly, gentle figure, Ma Phyo was opinionated and outspoken. She was also very vocal about her moral values, and as the oldest daughter of a single-mother household, she often talked about the struggle to keep a balance between her commitments at home and at work. One evening, Ma Khaing could not come to our evening walk, and Ma Phyo and I took a stroll on our own. We did not want to walk in the complete darkness of the courtyard of the training center, so we paced up and down underneath the light of the office building. We could just make out a group of trainees sitting by the flagpole in front of the dining hall a few feet away, far enough that we could hear one of the trainees playing the guitar and singing his heart out without bothering us. As we walked, Ma Phyo told me that she joined MAS in 2001 after graduating from Yezin Agricultural University, and in 2008, MAS chose her to go to Japan through OISCA. She came to the training center to prepare for two months, and subsequently went to Japan in 2009. When she returned in 2010, her bosses at MAS asked her if she wanted to return to MAS or stay at the OISCA training center in Yesagyo. She chose the latter. When I asked her why, she replied that she was grateful

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<sup>54</sup> Contrary to what some skeptics might think, I do not think that they were spies for the government. Their commitment to OISCA, as well as their committed struggles with it, was as strong as other staff, and I never heard of them reporting back to MAS.

(*kʏe:zu: shí te*) for the opportunity that OISCA gave her to go to Japan, and she wanted to work in OISCA out of a sense of *kʏe:zu:*.

I wanted to know if there was an end to this return, if there comes a time when she would be finished repaying that *kʏe:zu:*. She shook her head and explained that this was not how *kʏe:zu:* worked. For example, she elaborated, if I were to help her at some point, whether for a big problem or a small favor, she would help me in return at any time, for whatever reason it may be. In Japan, she said, it seemed that the concept of gratitude was different in that once you say “thank you,” the interaction was finished. “But in Burma/Myanmar, the giving back of *kʏe:zu:* is forever,” she explained (personal communication, October 22, 2010). Of course, I thought, this conclusion might differ if *kʏe:zu:* was compared to the concept of *on-gaeshi* rather than the simple word for “thank you” (*arigato*), since *on-gaeshi* is also used in reference to greater forms of gratitude and indebtedness such as to one’s parents. Japanese people would also say that *on-gaeshi* is something so great that the act of return could never be accomplished. Yet, Ma Phyo seemed to find meaning in *kʏe:zu:* in contrast to what she conceived to be Japanese ideas of gratitude, and thus the opposition appeared to serve a purpose in her conceptualization of *kʏe:zu:* as a particular ethical value. I felt that it was not my place to contradict her.

On another occasion, I asked about *kʏe:zu:* to one of the young male staff members, Ko Zaw, on our return journey from a village. A group of staff had conducted a training course on health and environmental issues through a WFP scheme, and this was the end of the three-day program. Ko Zaw was one of the youngest aid workers at OISCA, but he always walked with visible confidence and a slight smile on his lips, as if he knew that one day he would be a great man. On this day, he drove the motorcycle expertly through bumpy dirt paths that had been

liquefied into mud a few days earlier due to unseasonal rains, and were now hardened into an undulating obstacle course. I sat behind him gripping onto the sides of the vehicle with every limb. We could barely go faster than the goats wandering and bleating around us, and I took this as an opportunity to ask him some questions.

In response to my queries about his commitment to OISCA, he told me that he loved OISCA (*chit te*) because he had learned a lot of things there. He explained that before, he was just “a person from a village,” but then he became an OISCA trainee, went to study in Japan, and his way of thinking expanded. I asked him why he had stayed on at OISCA even after his training in Japan, and he replied that it was because OISCA was working for the development of Burma/Myanmar. He stressed that he felt very strongly about this purpose. He told me that lately he found himself unable to fall asleep thinking about work, excited about ways to improve the various projects for which he was responsible. He reiterated that this was why he continued working in OISCA, even though he had to live far from his family and could not make enough money to send them. Given that physical and emotional closeness with one’s family is extremely important in Burma/Myanmar, he told me that it was not easy to keep making this decision.

He told me, furthermore, that in order to do development work well, OISCA staff should not think only of themselves; they should always think about others. “How would staff be able to do that?” I asked. “It’s about having *kye:zu:* toward OISCA,” he answered. To my probing, he elaborated that this feeling of *kye:zu:* was something that would last a lifetime. What was valued in *kye:zu:* was not in contrast to the obligation of return, but rather the acknowledgment and sincere commitment to this obligation toward the other person in the interaction. It was the enormity of this commitment in

the form of an abundant sense of incalculable gratitude, and no other purpose, that was essential in *kye:zu:*.

What all of these points from Ma Khaing, Ma Phy, and Ko Zaw indicate is that the sense of obligation to return affective debts to OISCA was acceptable and even necessary in formulating *kye:zu:* as an ethical value. Moreover, this construction of *kye:zu:* depended on the purity of intentions. Therefore, it was important to show one's wholehearted commitment to the obligation to repay the other person. That is, to uphold a form of "pure return."

The importance of obscuring any notion of self-interest or coerced duty in this conceptualization of *kye:zu:* surfaced especially acutely in a moment when I ended up offending Ma Khaing. During one of our evening strolls, I asked her if *kye:zu:* was related to the making of merit. What if Burmese people were in a sense "allowing" others such as the Japanese to help them in humanitarian and development aid, thereby enabling these others to earn merit? Could it be possible that these acts of aid-as-merit-making were also forms of repayment as *kye:zu:* for some great favor that Burmese people did for the Japanese in the past? In that sense, was the *kye:zu:* among Burmese staff part of this cycle, and thus also a way to make merit?

My inquiry was an effect of a past conversation with a non-Buddhist Burmese person who was living in Japan. She told me that Burmese people do not say "*kye:zu: tin ba te*" ("thank you") often because the statement was already an act of return that cancels out the making of merit of the person to whom the phrase is directed (for similar observations about the non-use of "thank you" in other contexts see Appadurai 1985; Bornstein 2012: 13). For example, if she were to help me take care of my sick mother and I said "thank you" immediately, this would constitute a form of repayment that would diminish the quality of her action as sincere and voluntary. Her action

would gain moral value as merit only if one did not expect a return, and even a word of gratitude could threaten this. However, this did not mean that I stayed as a pure recipient; instead, my unstated obligation would be to then return this favor in other ways and after a considerable amount of time so that it would not appear as a repayment. This would also render my action out of *kye:zu:* less about the obligation to return and more sincere, and thus also a way to make merit for myself. She then continued to say that perhaps on some level, Burmese people took for granted the help that they received from foreign humanitarian and development agencies, such as after Cyclone Nargis in 2008, because they interpreted it as an expression of *kye:zu:*. That is, the people giving aid could be returning in *kye:zu:* what they received from Burmese people in a past life, and so their current work of aid was a balancing of that account. Furthermore, it was only by having recipients that one could become a giver and thus make merit, and so she suggested that in some ways Burmese people might think that they were “allowing” non-Burmese to have such an opportunity of merit-making (personal communication, December 13, 2009).

Aid work and *kye:zu:* in this interpretation were part of a system of exchange in which people acted with the purpose of making merit in mind. This did not seem completely negative to me, since it also promised a constant flow of people helping others as if helping oneself. However, Ma Khaing was clearly offended. Making her disagreement apparent in her voice, she told me that there might be people who think that way, but if there were people with difficulties who needed her help, she would help them out of a sincere wish to help them, not in order to earn merit. She added that the recipients of that help would also be truly grateful, not taking the help for granted. According to Ma Khaing, *kye:zu:* was not based on a form of calculation at all, whether material, monetary, or moral (personal communication, October 9, 2010).



Given this emphasis on the intentions and sentiments of the act, the comparison to *dāna* (moral charity, alms-giving) in Theravada Buddhism, as well as Hinduism and Jainism in other contexts, is instructive here, although not wholly explanatory as I suggest below.<sup>55</sup> Several anthropologists of South Asia engaging with theories of the gift and *dāna* have studied what was under-examined in Mauss's analysis: the "pure gift." Jonathan Parry (1986), for example, argues that unlike the Trobriand and Maori notions of exchange, the Hindu law of the gift of *dāna* denies reciprocity—something that he notes is also a characteristic of Theravada Buddhism. James Laidlaw (2000) also illustrates how Jain renouncers in India depend on the social labor that goes into maintaining *dāna* as unreciprocated gift-giving. What is interesting in Laidlaw's analysis, in particular, is that he takes note of the paradoxical character of the gift—that is, as Jacques Derrida (1992) argued, the gift as "pure gift" is an impossibility in so far as the acknowledgment of a gift as such already mobilizes obligations of exchange and thus is no longer itself. At the same time, what makes Laidlaw more compelling than Derrida, in my view, is that he does not see the "pure gift" and economies of exchange as mutually exclusive. In his view, ideas of the "pure gift" are not so much antithetical to exchange or commodities as mutually enabling. Parry also makes a similar point in arguing that the mixing of the spirit and thing is not what distinguishes reciprocal from non-reciprocal exchange, and that the "pure gift" and economies of exchange are in fact mutually constitutive.

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<sup>55</sup> I should point out that I do not consider *kye:zu:* to be a specifically Buddhist concept because non-Buddhist Burmese staff in OISCA also mentioned the notion to me as a reason for working in OISCA in ways similar to those of Buddhist staff. At the same time, it would be plausible that given the fact that the majority of Burmese people and the composition of Burmese society is dominantly Buddhist, views informed by Buddhism also prevailed amongst Burmese people regardless of religion.

I suggest that these readings of the gift are particularly provocative for the scholarship on *dāna* in Burma/Myanmar. In short, the proposal from Laidlaw and Parry that gifts and commodities, spirit and thing, and reciprocity and non-reciprocity are in fact intertwined is a perspective that challenges secularist assumptions of the gift, an argument that is taken up by Burma/Myanmar scholars, as I elaborate below. It seems to me, however, that Parry's analysis is in the end invested in portraying how certain subjects strive to maintain a category of the "pure gift" separate from exchange relations. He states that "where we have the 'spirit', reciprocity is denied; where there is reciprocity there is not much evidence of 'spirit'" according to Hindu Law and among Brahman priests (Parry 1986: 463). Thus, although he argues that the elaboration of ideas of the "pure gift" occurs most frequently in highly industrialized societies where there is a significant commercial sector, he seems to envision separate domains for religiously motivated "pure" giving and non-religious reciprocal transactions. The two seem to co-emerge, but never merge. Such separation of spheres recalls theories of secularization, in which the religious, economic, political, and other areas would occupy different parts of society. However, as recent scholars have pointed out, such conceptions of the secular—and its division from the religious—are in fact visions of a particular political order, of a particular time and place in history (Asad 2003; Mahmood 2006; Taylor 2007). I am not suggesting that Parry misread his subjects' concern with maintaining the category of the "pure gift," but I do contend that his analysis lends to a secularist view of the gift; that is, religious principles of pure gifts as a sphere to be distinguished, albeit in parallel existence, from economic exchanges, political interests, or other calculative reasonings.

In contrast, if we follow the insights that the gift exists motivated by both reciprocity and non-reciprocity at the same time, we begin to see how *dāna* could be an

expression of a worldview that does not assume secular orders. This is the perspective taken by scholars of Burmese Buddhism. Ingrid Jordt (2007) has focused on *dāna* most explicitly, showing in particular the importance of one's intention in determining the value of the alms-giving:

For the Burmese Buddhist laity, the "free will act of giving," as one scholar puts it, is considered the foundational practice on which other practices, in pursuit of the final soteriological goal of nibbana, can develop. Through repetitive acts of giving, the donor is understood to be cultivating a mental disposition toward the world characterized by a lessening of attachment to material wants... the ultimate goal of *dāna* is to transcend dependence on worldly material and social circumstances altogether. [Jordt 2007: 100]

As she states, therefore, "intention is the single most important criterion for the evaluation of the cosmic return of the gift" (Jordt 2007: 102). In many ways, this is supposed to be a deeply ethical act, in which one's personal intention and the act-for-the-act's sake are valued first and foremost. However, this does not hold in practice. As the above quote suggests, *dāna* is always already accompanied by the expectation that one will receive a cosmic return in the form of future merit, either in this life or the next. Thus, Jordt also explains that "this aspect of *dāna* exposes a practical or economic dimension that initially concerns the individuals' assurance that they will create generous conditions for their own and their families' future lives. But one's generosity also can serve as a marker of social status" (Jordt 2007: 106). The important point here is not that *dāna* in its ideal form of pure giving is deemed to be impossible, but that upholding this impossibility as a possibility is necessary in making *dāna* a mechanism of sociality.

This seems to be in contrast to Parry's analysis, which saw the "pure gift" not as an element of sociality, but the lack thereof (see also Bornstein 2012 for the ways that this lack of sociality in *dāna* as "pure gift" plays out in philanthropy in India). Both

Parry and Laidlaw focus on the social work of keeping certain things as “pure gift,” outside of exchange relations. However, as Julianne Schober has argued, to undermine the work that goes into making *dāna* part of an economy of merit in Burma/Myanmar is to reproduce Weber’s idea that Buddhism is “otherworldly” and the similar colonial secular assumption that Buddhism and politics could never be linked (Schober 2011: 120; see also Turner 2011). She argues:

This inquiry takes its departure from the premise that the social context of Buddhist practice is necessarily embedded in political realities. At the core of the social practice of Buddhist ideals lies an economy of merit in which lay people demonstrate their virtue of generosity by giving *dāna* to monks in various ritual settings. This practice of generosity helps lay people acquire spiritual rewards or merit occasioned by the monks’ acceptance of their donations. Merit thus acquired becomes manifested in future spiritual and material prosperity as well as in social status and political power. [Schober 2011: 120]

To a greater degree than Jordt, Schober emphasizes the social engagements and political legitimacy that acts such as *dāna* activate in Burmese society. But for this reality to take hold, it is important that the disinterestedness of acts of *dāna* is upheld as well. It was the simultaneous purity and sociality of *dāna* and merit-making acts that made the monks’ protests in 2007, the Saffron Revolution, so powerful. When the monks “turned over their bowls” (*thabeik hmauk*) to refuse to receive alms from state officials and thus to refuse to confer religious, social, and political legitimacy on certain lay persons, it gave momentum to the anti-government protests because it “involved the mobilization of fields of merit to bring about political transformations” (Schober 2011: 142). It was a moment made possible by the fact that gifts are both purity and sociality at the same time, receivers of *dāna* sustaining simultaneously the obligations of reciprocity and the principles of non-reciprocity. The work involved was not to make it one way or another.

Now, with this detour in mind, can we make better sense of *kye:zu:* being understood as a form of “pure return” among OISCA’s Burmese staff? In a way, if we analogize between *dāna* and *kye:zu:*, it might appear that the purity of *kye:zu:* is also the other half of exchange relations. In this view, Ma Phyō’s indignant reaction might seem disingenuous. Or it might seem that the insistence on the purity of *kye:zu:* in its intentions effectively separates it from political or even social domains. Such depoliticization might certainly be the case when we consider how Burmese staff, in using the language of *kye:zu:*, did not portray OISCA or Japanese staff as creditors in a moral debt-relation but rather obscured the imbalance in their relationship. However, what is different between *dāna* and *kye:zu:* is that in the latter, the act was not discussed as meritorious in a cosmic sense, but as an embrace of the obligation to return and repay within this-worldly social relations. As Ma Khaing told me one day, there is a proverb in Burma/Myanmar that goes: “If you have ever eaten a bite from him, he will always be your benefactor” (*tit louk sa: hpu:, thu kye:zu:*) (personal communication, November 5, 2010). If *dāna* inhabited the simultaneity of exchange and non-exchange, *kye:zu:* was squarely in the realm of social exchange, albeit not in the logic of reciprocity. In this sense, the “purity” that Burmese staff pursued with *kye:zu:* was not an escape from exchange relations, but rather, a complete commitment to the obligation of return in an exchange that had already happened, although it could only occur once because it could never be repaid in full. As such, I would not call it a moral economy; it is a form of ethics that upholds the virtue of the obligation for the obligation’s sake.

Taking this primacy of obligations seriously, then, another concept that can be compared to *kye:zu:* is *a:na-te*, an idea that Ko Zaw brought up. In our conversation, Ko Zaw stressed several times that there is a difference between the repayment of *kye:zu:* based on fear or a feeling of duty, and that which arises from “true feelings” (*hontō no*

*kimochi*). He explained that sometimes people might give back based on a feeling of *a:na-te*. *A:na-te* is used widely in Burma/Myanmar in contexts where a person feels restrained by a sense of respect, politeness, humility, or fear of offending others' feelings. Lucien Pye (1966) provides a useful place to begin, defining it in this way:

An emotion that wells up inside a Burmese, paralyzing his will, in particular preventing him from pushing his own self-interest and compelling him to hold back and accede to the demand of others... Apparently the Burmese feel that the considerations of [*a:na*] are appropriate in any situation in which one's interests might conflict with those of others or in which one might feel some sense of obligation or indebtedness to another. [Pye 1962: 149]

Thus, Pye saw *a:na-te* as a by-product of feelings of indebtedness, defining it as a negative emotional state of constraint and even paralysis. A similar sense of the word is found in this illustration as well:

For instance, you are feeling very hungry while at someone's home, but you feel *a:na* to tell the host to make something for you. Accordingly, a good host will tell visitors not to feel *a:na*, and to make themselves at home. Similarly, one might feel *a:na* if another person did many things for them, or assisted them in a significant way. For example, if a friend gives many presents or does many errands the recipient might start feeling very *a:na*. [ANU 2011]

Thus, the handful of scholars who have looked at the concept of *a:na-te* equate it, negatively, to the notion of moral debt. In contrast, Sarah M. Bekker (1981) gives a slightly different version. Although she does not discount Pye's definition, based on her own field research and experience living in Burma/Myanmar, she adds that *a:na-te* is also felt "as a quick rush of sympathy which causes one to do something immediately for another's welfare... between intimates, both friends and family members" (Bekker 1981: 21). Attending to the ways that the meanings and uses of *a:na-te* differ depending on social status and cultural group, Bekker illustrates the tension between restraint and sympathy that accompanies the concept, and how the term can sometimes be used by

someone in a higher status as well. Yet, she concludes her analysis by suggesting that the larger societal implications of the concept are more negative than not:

Because each person's behavior is so strongly determined by emotional ties and obligations to friends and relatives as individuals, growth of feelings of responsibility to society as a whole is necessarily slow... For example, when villagers agree to clean up their place or build a new wall for protection, the basis for the action is "if you'll do it, I'll do it, too." The activity undertaken by each is the same and parallel, simultaneous, but not cooperative in the sense of individual efforts blended into a common purpose for the welfare of the whole. The Burmese is willing to join in a common activity to oblige a friend or to avoid being. [Bekker 1981: 32]

Bekker attributes the general passivity that she saw of citizens vis-à-vis the state and the government's own isolation from the rest of the world as a manifestation of the *a:na-te* that functioned on person-to-person terms, to the detriment of "society as a whole." In short, she believed in the ethical value of "scaling up," and the horizontal logic of parallel interactions in *a:na-te* could not become a basis for principles of social welfare.

Ko Zaw seemed to suggest that *kye:zu:* differed from *a:na-te* precisely on this point. He told me explicitly that he did not like the kind of return based on notions of *a:na-te*, that is, because one feels obligated to repay. To give back because of *kye:zu:*, he repeated, should come from true feelings, and neither the intention nor the content of the repayment should be determined by a sense of duty. Instead of a sense of parallel exchange, he saw *kye:zu:* to function on a logic of abundance, a limitless sense of gratitude. But this was not a mode of scaling up; it was understood in a different vision of abundance. I asked him if there was a difference between what one gives back as *kye:zu:* based on the size of the favor. He nodded, and told me that there would be a difference between big and small favors, but the content of the act of *kye:zu:* depended on one's subjective feelings. It was not about reaching a quantitative equilibrium, in material or affective terms. And as Ma Phy, Ko Zaw expressed *kye:zu:* toward OISCA

as a feeling of gratitude that was abundant and incalculable. What was important in this formulation was that the obligation of return was there, but it had to appear in an excessive form—that is, in the form of a voluntary commitment to a sense of abundant gratitude that did not exist in order to serve a purpose, but was valuable in itself.

The difficulty here is that the Burmese staff emphasized the importance of pure intentions within a framework of obligation. In explanations of *kye:zu:*, freedom and obligation are not separate demands. Ma Khaing, Ma Phyo, and Ko Zaw emphasized the importance of *kye:zu:* as a fulfillment of the obligation to repay a moral debt in an abundant, incalculable sense of gratitude that was neither/both free and constrained.

In his final point, Ko Zaw told me that since OISCA was ultimately working for the development of Burma/Myanmar, the act of returning *kye:zu:* to OISCA as a Burmese staff member meant that he was contributing to the development of his own country (personal communication, October 31, 2010). Presumably, it was in this sense that he thought that *kye:zu:* was necessary for staff to be able to think of others in their work. Thus, even though *kye:zu:* was not a reciprocal exchange, the fact that it was impossible to repay the original creditor allowed Ko Zaw to articulate *kye:zu:* as a motivation for aid work in general. At the same time, this invocation of the grateful debt of *kye:zu:* ultimately seemed to erase the role of OISCA as the creditor, as if it were a transparent vessel through which other relations could be forged. As we will see, this was the crux of all three forms of indebtedness discussed in this chapter.

### **Debt Equivalences: *On-gaeshi***

One February afternoon at one of the training centers in Japan, Ko Aung, a Burmese trainee, gave a speech. He had been a trainee at the OISCA training center in Burma/Myanmar, spent a year working as an alumni staff, and was finally selected to



become a trainee in Japan in 2009. He was a friendly young man who always joked with the other trainees, and seemed to keep an upbeat attitude about everything. On this particular afternoon, trainees had been asked to talk in Japanese about what was most important to them. They had been in Japan for about ten months at this point, and although the basic Japanese language training was only for the first two months, most of them acquired an impressive command of the language in a few months' time. It was perhaps as a matter of course, or as a necessity for survival, since most of the Japanese staff did not speak English, and the training was conducted in Japanese. Since many of the trainees also did not speak English, Japanese became the common language. Ko Aung stood by the blackboard in front of the dozen trainees from around the world—the Philippines, Bangladesh, Fiji, Tibet. At the time, Ma Phyo was actually also there for her initial year of training in Japan.

Ko Aung stood next to the blackboard in front of the brightly lit classroom, and spoke about the importance of his parents, and the *on-gaeshi* that he felt for them. He explained that he found the word in his Burmese-Japanese dictionary, and the Japanese staff member standing next to him nodded, understanding what he was trying to say. Ma Phyo leaned over to my desk, and asked me what *on-gaeshi* meant. I answered in Burmese, “*kye:zu:*.” She gave a big nod, as if approving of the concept that I was conveying. “There is no such word in English, right?” she asked. I nodded. At this point, Ko Aung was struggling to explain the word to the other trainees, but it was not going well. “Does it mean kindness? Love?” Both Ko Aung and Ma Phyo tried to correct them. “What my parents have done for me,” explained Ko Aung, “the way that they have taken care of me, it’s like the ocean because of the enormity of it. At the same time, it’s bigger than the ocean because the ocean can be measured in the end, but their

care for me is immeasurable.” So, he concluded, now he wanted to take care of his parents in return, and asked the other trainees to do the same for their parents.

On this day, I had equated the Japanese word *on-gaeshi* with the Burmese term *kye:zu;*, but later I realized that the two were used differently in OISCA. According to dictionaries, the translation was not wrong, but they seemed to work through different modalities in OISCA. In this section I argue that *on-gaeshi*, as the term was used in OISCA, had a more pronounced effect of flattening relations as if the participants were all on equal footing in relations of mutual dependency, with disquieting effects. *On-gaeshi* in many contexts in Japan is used in the ways that Burmese staff explained *kye:zu;*, that is, as abundant feelings of debt-gratitude that are not imagined to be completely repaid, as in one’s indebtedness to one’s parents. As with *kye:zu;*, this also constituted the ethical value of *on-gaeshi*. *On-gaeshi*, in the ways that it appeared in OISCA, brought to light the underbelly of the double-edgedness of moral debts by showing us what could be obscured through such intermingling of obligations and ethical value.

The notion of *on-gaeshi* appears first in Yonosuke Nakano’s words. OISCA’s founder taught the importance of gratitude toward nature and the universe, from which he believed all life had been born. In 1963, he wrote:

Humans and all creation are in the womb of the Great Life of the Universe. Even after we have been birthed onto this earth by the power of Great Nature, we receive the protection of the skies connected through the lifeline that is invisible to our eyes; we are given the bounties of the earth and breathe the air of the great skies. The true essence of human beings is the heart in which a sense of gratitude [*kansha*] for the great *on* of the skies and universe arises in the face of such immense truth. [Yonosuke Nakano 1963: 42]

In this formulation, Nakano links gratitude with indebtedness, *kansha* with *on*, in the face of nature and the Great Spirit of the Universe that unites all life and things in this

world.<sup>56</sup> This sense of *on* and its return underlie much of the philosophy in OISCA today, particularly as it concerns its agricultural activities. In 2011, when a group of veteran OISCA staff and supporters came together to discuss and reminisce about OISCA on its 50th anniversary, Tsuyoshi Nara, a professor at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and long-time supporter of Nakano and OISCA since the early 1960s, stated that OISCA is first and foremost based on a philosophy of *on-gaeshi* to nature. He explains:

If one does not truly realize that we live each moment thanks to the bountiful blessings [*megumi*] of great nature [*tenchi shizen*], I do not think that one can understand the founder's [Yonosuke Nakano] thoughts. The disaster this time [of March 11, 2011] is said to be a once-in-a-thousand-years event; this means that we have been blessed by great nature for about 999 years and three months, and we have realized this for the first time after the great disaster. But whether or not there is a disaster, we must always live in gratitude and *on-gaeshi* for the blessings of great nature—that is OISCA's fundamental spirit and the foundation of OISCA's human education (*ningen kyōiku*). [OISCA 2011]

Thus, the primary form of *on-gaeshi* in OISCA emerged in discourses about nature and agriculture, essentially arguing that we as humans are eternally indebted to the Great Universe for our most basic existence. Even young staff and supporters who felt uncomfortable about OISCA's religious affiliations seemed to embrace this idea.

Another area in which the idea of *on-gaeshi* appeared in OISCA was in descriptions about local aid actors. For example, an article from the OISCA magazine about the Myanmar project focuses on a Burmese village leader, who had received aid from OISCA, and was now starting his own community development initiatives. The title of the piece is: "For the Development of the Village, and for the Return of *On* (*on-gaeshi*) to OISCA." The village leader is quoted as saying how his community, like

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<sup>56</sup> Arguably, *kansha* and *on* are different conceptualizations of debt-gratitude. Nevertheless, I suggest that in OISCA the two terms were used interchangeably, and furthermore, understandings of *on-gaeshi* took precedence.

others in this arid region, suffers from lack of water, which affects agricultural work and the stability of the villagers' income. However, he continues, since the previous year, with WFP's assistance, OISCA and the villagers had been working together to fix the roads and water reservoir, which helped improve the villagers' livelihoods. Furthermore, many of the villagers now buy OISCA's piglets and bokashi organic fertilizer, and many of them want to learn the techniques behind these products, he writes. He concludes: "I want to work hard, together as one with the villagers, for the development of the village, and for *on-gaeshi* to OISCA" (OISCA 2010b: 10).

In another article from May 2012 in the OISCA magazine, a father and daughter from Indonesia are featured, both of whom work in OISCA. The father was an OISCA trainee in Jakarta in 1982, and received further trainings in OISCA's training centers in Japan starting in 1983. Upon his return to Indonesia, he became an OISCA staff in the Jakarta office. In 2004, his daughter Sisca—named after the words "siswa" which means student or trainee in Indonesian and OISCA—transferred to the OISCA high school in Japan. After graduating, she continued on to study accounting and computer skills in Indonesia, subsequently joining OISCA's Jakarta office as a staff member. Since October 2011, she had been working in OISCA's Tokyo office. In the article, the father explains that the work with OISCA had been his career and lifework, and raised his children hoping that one of them would become his successor. He was delighted when Sisca finally chose to work with OISCA. At the same time, he added, he never told her to do so. He states:

Sisca was able to study at the OISCA high school thanks to OISCA's scholarship, and so I did tell her not to forget the sense of gratitude, and to live a life that would enable a return of *on (on-gaeshi)* to OISCA. The final decision was hers. [OISCA 2012: 8]

Sisca explains her perspective as well, describing how she hated OISCA when she was young for being the reason that her father was never home. However, she describes how her opinion changed after going to the OISCA high school, and has since had a strong sense of gratitude to OISCA for giving her that opportunity. Joining OISCA was a natural choice after that, she concludes (OISCA 2012).

In both of these cases, *on-gaeshi* is used—by the Japanese staff who wrote these articles—to explain the motivations and feelings of non-Japanese actors. Certainly, the Burmese village leader might have used the term *kye:zu:* and been translated as *on-gaeshi*, as I did when Ko Aung gave his speech, and Sisca’s father could have spoken in Japanese to the author and said *on-gaeshi* himself—not unthinkable since most non-Japanese staff in OISCA speak some if not almost fluent Japanese. However, if we were to make the analogy between the discourse of *on-gaeshi* to nature and *on-gaeshi* to OISCA, it would lead to the suggestion that OISCA has offered blessings as great as nature to local villagers and staff. If that were the case, local actors would be forever indebted to OISCA, just as humans are and should be indebted to nature. OISCA’s Japanese staff would most likely disagree with this interpretation. Nevertheless, the echo is hard to resist here, and furthermore, when placed next to the concept of *kye:zu:*, the Burmese term also begins to look a lot like coercion.

In yet another twist, however, Japanese staff and supporters used *on-gaeshi* to describe how Japanese aid actors themselves should and do feel in conducting aid work. The most salient instance of this appeared when I met a 90-year old former Japanese politician in Tokyo who had been an enthusiastic supporter of OISCA since the 1970s. I will call him Nagase. When I asked him why he had been so committed to international aid and OISCA for so long, he told me that it was because many countries helped Japan after the war, such as through World Bank loans. Japan took out a total of

thirty-one loans amounting to 863 million dollars between 1953 and 1966, and the final repayment was made in July 1990. In reference to this history of international aid to postwar Japan, Nagase stressed that Japan needed to do something in return once it became one of the most powerful nations in the world—in his words, “now it is Japan’s turn to do *on-gaeshi*.” In his mind, international aid by Japanese actors was a form of *on-gaeshi* to the world. Later in our conversation he touched on the fact that he spent three years in an internment camp in Siberia during the Second World War. He told me that he was still amazed that he came back alive, when others had died or lost their minds. He told me how on his way back to Japan, “they” (he did not specify who) took away the hundreds of *haiku* poems that he had written during encampment, the one thing that had kept him alive and sane for three years. He told me that he was devastated, and never wrote *haiku* again. He quietly said, “In Siberia... you came to feel desperate for god. It’s a feeling that can’t be expressed in words, can it?” (personal communication, April 27, 2010). Although in actual economic and geopolitical terms, the aid that Japan received after the war and the aid that Japan has been giving to developing countries cannot be linked in causal terms, they were related in some way for Nagase. In his mind, the physical and psychological devastation of war, probably both as captive and aggressor as a soldier, the ways in which other countries provided aid to Japan after the war, and the commitment to international aid as a form of *on-gaeshi* occupied related terrains.

A similar link between aid work by Japanese actors, war, and *on-gaeshi* was expressed to me by Sakurai as well. One day, I asked him if he had ever met Burmese people who talk about Japanese soldiers’ violence during the war. He shook his head and told me that sometimes he does encounter villagers who, when they meet him, suddenly bring out objects that they have kept from the war, such as a Japanese *katana*

sword, because he is the first Japanese person that they have seen since the war. As he told me this, he seemed to imply that these were uncharged moments, the Burmese person showing him the objects without reproach or anger. He continued to tell me that, in his opinion, a lot of Japanese people doing development work, at least until recently, were probably motivated by a sense of *on-gaeshi* for the trouble (*meiwaku*) that they caused to local communities during the war (personal communication, November 8, 2010). From our earlier conversations, I knew that he did not believe that Japanese imperial forces committed atrocities, that those events were all part of a justified war. And so his euphemism of the word “trouble” was not surprising, but I was taken aback by his use of the notion of *on-gaeshi*. While other Japanese NGOs that I know explicitly frame their work in the Asia-Pacific as a form of atonement for what the Japanese military did, such as the Asia Rural Institute (ARI) mentioned in the introduction, Sakurai framed the work as *on-gaeshi*, thereby conflating and changing the responsibility of atonement into an ethical act of debt-gratitude.

This was, in fact, not a unique move. Let me quote at length from an article in the Myanmar Times from March 2011 titled “Friends and Family Pay Tribute to Japanese War Veteran,” written by a Burmese reporter:

Mr. Inada was a man who had a great deal of affection for Myanmar and its people. He believed that half of his life had been given to him by the people of this country because they helped him survive World War II, when many other Japanese soldiers perished... Ms. Sachiko [his daughter] was in Myanmar to fulfill one of her father’s final wishes. “He asked for us to bury half of his ashes in Myanmar after he died”... [A Burmese woman said] “Even though we were the enemies of Japan in that war, Myanmar people often helped Japanese soldiers like Mr. Inada”... Sitting near Ms. Sachiko on February 1 was U Han Lin, a Japanese-speaking tour guide, who met Mr. Inada for the first time in 2001. “I was his tour guide on 15 visits, from 2001 until his death. On these trips he visited 20 places where the Japanese fought in the war... He would pray not only for the Japanese soldiers but also the Allied soldiers and Myanmar people who died in war,” U Han Lin said. In 2007, Mr. Inada helped to upgrade facilities at a primary school in Mandalay Region. He

said he decided to offer the assistance as a way of honouring the memory of his comrades-at-arms who had died in the region... “I want to come again just as my father did,” Ms. Sachiko adds. “So please take care of me, just like you all cared for him”. [Yu Yu Maw 2011: 6]

I do not doubt Mr. Inada’s sense of debt-gratitude. But it seems to me that the language of *on-gaeshi* here had the effect of shifting the issue from one of atonement to one in which the Japanese actors appeared as the agents of ethical returns of moral debt (and appropriate recipients of care). Furthermore, if in OISCA’s activities, *on-gaeshi* was something that Japanese actors felt toward the world as well as something expected from aid recipients and local staff, it could become an ethical value that forged proximity between the two. In other words, the message was: you and I have both been vulnerable and received help from others, and so we are both subjects of *on-gaeshi*, tied in the intimate bind of humanity’s mutual dependency. In the face of this logic of the equivalence of indebtedness, the question of violence and atonement seemed to become almost obscene, and thus unspeakable.

### **Systematizing the Loans**

While *kye:zu:* and *on-gaeshi* related to ideas of moral debt, monetary indebtedness was also a condition of being a member of OISCA for the Burmese actors at the Myanmar training center. During my stay at the OISCA training center in Yesagyo, I lived in the same building as Sakurai, a solid wooden structure with a living room and kitchen in the central space, a bedroom on each side, and a corridor in the back corner of the living room that led to the bathroom and shower room. Unlike the structures in most other houses in this region with their large windows and doors on all sides that allowed the air to pass through, OISCA staff and supporters, mainly Ananaikyō members from Japan, had designed and built this irregular structure based on Japanese



ideas of architecture, and so it was badly ventilated. Yet, this was the only common space I had, and so if I was not with other people or working in the fields, I spent my time there.

One evening as I stood checking my e-mail in the semi-darkness of the living room, I felt a presence near me. It was one of the younger staff members, and I had barely spoken to him since I arrived. At first I thought that he was looking for Sakurai, and told him that he was not there. “No,” he shook his head, “I want to speak with you.” He asked, “When will you go back to Japan? When will you leave the training center?” “November,” I answered, my heart racing slightly. I did not know where he was going with this. He said something that I did not quite catch at first. “Can you lend me money?” he repeated, reluctantly. “My parents are poor and I want to help them. Please help me if you can.” I stood there for a moment, hoping that the increasing darkness outside would mask the fact that I was hesitating in my answer. “No,” I finally said. “I can’t. I’m sorry.” He nodded and said, “Please don’t tell anyone that I asked you this, not even the Burmese staff. They will get angry at me.” “Of course I won’t tell,” I assured him.

For a while later I turned this moment over and over in my head, trying to figure out what exactly had passed between us. The bottom line was that I did not trust him enough to lend him money, and we did not share enough of a social network through which I could feel sure that I would get the money back. I also did not want to create a creditor-debtor relationship with staff. And the young man understood this.

But it quickly became apparent to me that Burmese people entered into monetary credit/debt (*akywe/kywe:*) relations on a daily basis and with multiple people. Many times I saw a staff approach another staff—staff of lower position and younger to one of higher position and older—to ask if they could delay their repayment, or staff return

money to other staff immediately after receiving their monthly salaries. People also incurred debts at nearby stores, often not having enough money on them to pay for the tea or snack that they had ordered, usually for their group of friends and never for themselves alone. The debts as well as their repayments were ubiquitous and rather fluid, and the conditions of the debts were never set in stone. These informal debts were clearly an important part of the social fabric, and my reluctance with the staff above as well as his own embarrassment were indications that I was an outsider.

In contrast to these practices of informal debt-relations, there was a system of loans at the training center that was increasingly being formalized by Sakurai. One evening, I asked him about it.<sup>57</sup> Official loans to staff and former trainees were, after all, a remarkable system that I had never seen in other Japanese or international NGOs. Sakurai had become the director of the training center in 2008, taking over operations from Kawaguchi, who was an expert farmer and had been in Burma/Myanmar for over a decade. This was a hard act to follow, especially given that the Burmese staff, trainees, and villagers respected the previous director for his age as much as for his commitment to the country and agricultural knowledge, whereas Sakurai was still in his mid-thirties. Some of the Burmese staff members were older than him, and the discrepancy between status and age often led to conflicts. Despite all of this, Sakurai had been working hard to implement changes in the training center in order to prepare Burmese staff to operate all projects on their own in the near future. One of these changes was the loan system.

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<sup>57</sup> The OISCA Myanmar project also runs a microcredit project for local villagers. Unfortunately, this is outside the scope of this chapter, which focuses specifically on the relationship between OISCA and its staff. Furthermore, Sakurai began systems for a retirement fund and health insurance at the training center, another dimension of financial matters at OISCA that is unfortunately outside the scope of this chapter.

According to Sakurai, the topic of loans to local staff was an issue that came up every year at the annual overseas directors' meeting in Tokyo. It seemed that in the other countries where OISCA works, local staff also ask the Japanese directors or staff if they can borrow money for various family or personal reasons. Sakurai explained that it was not only the villagers and trainees who needed OISCA's assistance, but the staff who were themselves former trainees and villagers with families in need of aid. His view was that it was hard to say who *did not* need help at the training center in Burma/Myanmar. Everyone faced difficulties, and although OISCA's staff lived at the training center and thus did not have to pay for living expenses, they could not afford much. "Therefore," he added, "the [Japanese] directors in OISCA's overseas training centers have been giving loans to local staff from the project funds in a sense of *on*." OISCA's Japanese staff knew that these loans were used to support the staff's families, and so Sakurai explained that these loans were also ways in which OISCA provided aid to local communities (personal communication, November 10, 2010).

Sakurai saw these as acts of generosity that could not be condemned, but he did not believe that they were appropriate. He explained that Kawaguchi gave out loans based on his discretion, and there was no interest on the loans or strict deadlines for repayment. He thought that although his predecessor was extremely skilled in various ways, he did not keep a close eye on these loans, and Sakurai feared that this lack of system would lead to financial problems for the training center in the future. In fact, Kawaguchi had never even implemented the use of formal budgets or any other form of financial management—this was possible because of OISCA's particular approach to aid work, which valued hard work and spiritual commitment above all else. The Japanese directors overseas had always been trusted by the Tokyo headquarters to make training centers work in whatever way they saw fit as agricultural experts, such

as Kawaguchi. But this approach had been changing dramatically since the 1990s, especially with the increase of corporate donors and official funding agencies financing OISCA's activities, making formal financial management and reporting necessary. Kawaguchi had been able to operate the Myanmar training center without a standard financial management system for longer than other project sites because the training center had been successfully financing itself without donors for many years. However, Sakurai knew that this was not a sustainable system.

Once Sakurai became the director, he required all staff and alumni seeking loans to sign an agreement, a stipulation that made the obligation of repayment very visible. The system of loans for Burmese staff allowed loans for up to 300,000 kyats per year (about 300 U.S. dollars as of 2010), with an interest rate of five percent. The Burmese accounting staff, Ma Aye, told me that about three-fourths of the Burmese staffers were taking out loans from OISCA at the time (personal communication, October 21, 2010). The reasons varied, but she explained that the two most common objectives were to take distance-learning university courses and to send money to their parents.<sup>58</sup>

The second and larger loan scheme was for alumni, that is, former trainees. Ma Khaing was in charge of managing this scheme, and she had records of these alumni loans from 2001. She was always generous and thoughtful in answering my questions, and when I asked her about alumni loans, she took me to the office to show me her hand-written records. According to this data, 161 alumni out of 264 had used the loan system in the last nine years, about three-fourths of all alumni during that time. These loans were meant to help former trainees start their own agricultural projects, applying what they learned at OISCA in their own communities. Some of them took out loans

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<sup>58</sup> Many of the Burmese staff attended university through distance-learning programs, having to go to the university physically a few times a year for exams.

several times, starting at 50,000 kyats (about 50 U.S. dollars as of 2010) the first year without interest. The maximum amount of loans that alumni could take out was 300,000 kyats per year (about 300 U.S. dollars as of 2010), with an interest rate of five percent the first year on the principal, ten percent up to a year and a half, and twenty percent after that.

In explaining the reasoning for these alumni loans, Sakurai told me that in Burma/Myanmar, failure is greatly discouraged, but he believed that failures are necessary for the growth of these former trainees. “These alumni loans exist in order to encourage them to try new things and be okay about making mistakes at first,” he explained (personal communication, October 27, 2010). He laughed and told me that in some ways, these were loans that OISCA gave out with the possibility that the money might never be returned.

In order to encourage this entrepreneurial spirit in using the loans, Sakurai began a scheme in which newly graduated trainees had to present “Action Plans” if they wanted the first-year loan of 50,000 kyats. Ma Khaing told me that fifteen trainees out of twenty used this scheme after completing their training program in 2009, and only one person had been unable to return the loan in the first year. In addition, OISCA holds an all-alumni meeting at the end of April every year, and older alumni can request loans then as well. Starting in 2010, OISCA had started to ask these older alumni to present Action Plans as well, and a committee of five Burmese staff and Sakurai make the decision on the loan, and how much. Ma Khaing explained that there were also alumni who came to the training center at other times of the year to ask for loans, and they had to go through the same process as well. In 2010, the training center also began requiring borrowers to send a six-month report describing how they were using the money, specifically in light of the Action Plans that they had proposed. In

this sense, the Action Plans made it clear that the loans were a form of contract in which the borrowing alumni were held responsible for their own actions, or inactions.

Contractual agreements were indeed what Sakurai introduced to the loan scheme. In the discussion that follows, I am interested in the ways that the agreement as a document attempted to create certain realities and social norms, but only in uncertain ways. I accept that the agreements as documents have discursive effects on subjects, but these are inconclusive, short of what Max Weber (1968) described as technologies of social organization and what Michel Foucault (1977) called disciplinary effects. Neither are the effects of the agreements that I examine here about the circulation of non-human objects with human-like agency (Pinney 2005; cf. Callon 1986; Latour 1992). I focus, instead, on the aspirational qualities of the documents, invested with certain imaginations of the future but without the certainty of how its actualization in the “real world” would take place (cf. Miyazaki 2006; see also Riles 2006b). What I am attempting to do here is to attend to a conceptually narrow space that is between meanings and the “social lives” of objects (Appadurai 1986), in a space of expectation that is neither referential text nor material sociality. I suggest that both the language and the material existence of the agreements together constructed aspirations for certain kinds of subjects, but did not complete their actual realization. As I explain below, it was the uncertainty of the trajectory and conclusion of these aspirations that compelled Burmese staff to follow-up on the unfulfilled promises of the agreements and produce further relations.

Curious to see what a loan agreement looked like, one day I asked Ma Khaing if I could see a sample. She showed me the agreement for alumni loans. In addition to setting the maximum amounts allowed, the document repeats the importance of repaying on time several times and the imposition of a five percent interest during the

year of the loan contract and on any additional overdue months. The interest is only on the principal and does not compound, so the amount stays the same or decreases if part of the principal is paid. Sakurai explained the importance of interest in this manner: “The reason for adding interest on the loans is so that staff and alumni don’t think of these loans as a form of gift (*zōyo*)” (personal communication, November 14, 2010). He was defining gift in this sense as a “pure gift,” something that did not demand definite obligations to repay. As with *on-gaeshi* in regard to loans, he was always wary of ways that certain practices might be based on generosity or kindness. In his view, incalculable sentiments could not be the core elements of an organizational system because they were too uncertain, especially when it came to financial management. He saw the addition of interest on loans to be a way to indicate that these were not based on sentiments of the gift as such. The distinction between the uncertainty of return in the sentiments of gifts and the certainty of repayments in loans was important to him.<sup>59</sup>

Yet, although this certainty of repayment was emphasized in the agreement, it was not with the view to conclude debt-relations in general. On the contrary, the wording of the agreement, written in Burmese, constructs endpoints as the opportunity to renew and repeat debt-relations. In particular, I point to the way that the agreement is couched between two promises. The third line, after the listing of amounts allowed, states: “The loans above can be borrowed either once or repeatedly. However, the person can only take out another loan after repaying the loan (interest and principle).” The eighth and last line concludes: “If [the person] does not follow the above terms, another loan cannot be given.” Taken in its reverse, this last line expresses the

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<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, Mauss himself explains that in the potlatch, gifts always had to be returned with an interest rate of 30-100% (Mauss 1990[1950]: 42). The introduction of this interest rate shows that gifts were never only about equivalence, nor about a “pure gift,” as Sakurai would like to believe. The potlatch in Mauss’s reading, in this sense, seems to suggest that gifts and loans are not clearly distinguishable.

assumption that the borrowers will want more loans, and another loan can be given if the borrower follows the terms. The onus is ultimately on the debtor-alumni.

Yet, evidently, alumni did not always follow the terms of the agreement. A number of the borrowers did not return the debts on time and current staff had to go after them for repayment. One afternoon, Ma Khaing sat with me in the office for a second time to explain to me the alumni loan system. Showing me a handwritten table in a large notebook recording the loans and their returns over the last nine years, she indicated that, as of April 2009, 23 people had taken out loans that year, 17 returned their debts, one promised to return it by the end of the year, and five people were completely unable to return the money. I commented that this did not seem like a bad result. She began to nod, but halfway through the gesture, she seemed to change her mind, and pointed out that they still had many challenges. For example, at first they had loan agreements that only the borrower had to sign, and this did not stop borrowers from shirking the deadlines indefinitely. Since the OISCA training center is a small NGO and not a loan company, there was only so much that they could do to follow-up on these lapsed loans. Taking inspiration from microcredit schemes, they then tried a system in which alumni were placed in groups of five to have a mutual guarantee of repayment, and promise to return the money together at the following all-alumni meeting in April. However, this also failed because they often could not get in touch with each other, and some of them would not attend the all-alumni meeting, and thus the group would fail to repay. Consequently, in 2010 they decided to require a guarantor, such as the borrower's father, to sign the agreement as well. Both of them had to write down their national identification numbers so that OISCA's current staff could find them and request payment, if necessary.



In fact, Ma Khaing explained, part of her job was to travel to these debtor-alumni's homes to ask for repayment. Every year, Ma Khaing and other staff wrote letters to those whose repayments were late, but if they did not receive a response, Ma Khaing had to visit a select few in order to see what was happening. Her duties were usually at the training center, so these trips had to be organized during her holidays, sometimes having to travel for days to reach one destination only to find that the alumnus-debtor was not there. She told me that usually about eighty percent of the people she visited were able to return the full amount. However, she continued to explain that some of the alumni were still like children, in their early twenties, living with their parents and never having started a business on their own, which is what the loans were meant to inspire. She remembered in particular an alumnus who borrowed money in 2004, and was unable to return the debt. When she finally visited his home, he was not working, or doing anything else. His parents were also poor, so they could not return the loan on his behalf either. She left without the money. I wondered how long Ma Khaing would continue to visit his home, and expect repayment.<sup>60</sup>

If the agreements expressed an aspiration to produce subjects who would repay the loans at particular points in time, the incompleteness of this expectation called upon the staff to intervene and follow-up on the trajectory that the document was supposed to activate. In this sense, although the language of the agreement promised an indefinite repetition of the debt-relation if the borrower repaid on time, the failure to repay also ensured a continuation of the alumni's relationship with OISCA. But these were evidently different kinds of relations. In the former, the debtor would have the option to renew the debt-relation or stop. In the latter, the debtor-alumni would be

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<sup>60</sup> Due to the logistical and political constraints of doing research in Burma/Myanmar, I could not speak with alumni-debtors themselves.

perpetually bound to OISCA and its staff in a relationship of creditor-debtor. The overarching expectation of the document, however, was that the state of indebtedness would continue. Once the person was inside the system and became a debtor, the only way out would be to play by the rules and repay.

At the same time, however, it should be pointed out that since OISCA's resources in following-up on delayed repayments were limited, and since OISCA's relationship to alumni as well as staff was intimate given the nature of their work, as I have shown in previous chapters, these debt-relations lacked the weight that large microcredit schemes might have in other contexts. The lapsed debtor from 2004 will probably continue to be a lapsed debtor, without further material consequences for him or his family due to his debt-relation with OISCA.

If the agreement and the imposition of interest on the loans increasingly clarified the relationship between OISCA and the Burmese staff and alumni who wanted to borrow money as one of creditor and debtor, Sakurai had come up with two ingenious strategies that effectively aimed to change the relationship. First, he changed the system of repayment for staff-debtors so that now their monthly repayments were automatically taken out of their paychecks. Certainly the staff would *know* that they were getting paid less due to the loan repayments, but the automatic return served to obscure the obligation to repay. After the moment of the loan, staff could interact with OISCA as if they were not in a creditor-debtor relationship. The second new system was a rule that Sakurai implemented in 2010, in which the amount and number of loans for each year would be determined depending on the amounts returned the previous year. In other words, it was the responsibility of the current year's debtors to repay the loans on time and finance the loans for the following year. Sakurai explained to me that this was not only a way to secure financial stability, but more importantly, to make

alumni realize that if they did not repay on time, they would be denying money to the other alumni who would want to take out loans in the future (personal communication, November 10, 2010). In this sense, the debtors in the agreement would not only be responsible to themselves, but also to the other future debtors. Furthermore, the imposition of interest meant that if the borrowers were able to return the debt with the interest, they would in turn eventually become the creditors of OISCA's scheme of loans and to the future borrowers. Repayment with interest was not only an obligation here, but also a promise that it would lead to debtors and creditors shifting their roles, and furthermore, that the current manager of the loans, the Japanese staff, would become obsolete.

But what would not change in this new system would be the fact that the creditor would still be OISCA, the organization. The only difference would be that, while before it seemed that "OISCA" as the creditor was synonymous with Japanese staff and particularly Sakurai, now "OISCA" appeared as an entity that included the debtors themselves. The creditor, then, would no longer seem to be like a creditor, and the debtor would not appear to be merely a debtor. The debtor would in effect also become their own creditor. The continuing fact that OISCA is a Japanese organization with headquarters in Japan, and ultimately governed by Japanese staff and board members, seemed to recede from view—at least, I suggest, that appeared to be the anticipated effect of this new system.

### **Between a Debt and a Hard Place**

On a trip to a village to conduct trainings in health, I had a chance to chat with Ma Phyto over lunch. She was interested in knowing how I got to Cornell because she was considering getting a master's degree in agriculture. She told me that MAS had a

program through which MAS employees could go to a master's program in another country for a year, and she found one that she liked in Korea. But when she asked Sakurai if she could apply to this—although I am not sure why she needed to get his permission—he denied her request. He told her that OISCA had paid a significant amount of money for her to go to Japan, and so she should work for OISCA for at least a few years, presumably as a form of repayment. Ma Phyo told me this bitterly and commented that she would not stay in OISCA forever, and will someday go to a master's program (personal communication, October 29, 2010).

This was the same Ma Phyo who had told me that she had decided to stay at the training center rather than return to MAS because of her sense of *kye:zu:* to OISCA, limitless and incalculable. Although in some ways I do understand Sakurai's concerns, it was also evident that making explicit the obligation to return the moral debt and linking this to monetary issues was detrimental to Ma Phyo's commitment to continue working in OISCA. Sakurai's statement seemed to have undermined the purity of the intentions, and thus the ethical value of Ma Phyo's *kye:zu:*, by introducing a formality to the obligation of repayment. Therefore, just as the mention of a formal form of merit took away from the value attributed to *kye:zu:* for its own sake, the overt declaration of the obligation to repay, particularly in monetary terms, rendered *kye:zu:* part of an instrumental structure in which the act of return became simply a way to fulfill a formal duty. For the Burmese staff, it was important to maintain the fact that *kye:zu:* was an obligation but something to which one would commit freely. Thus, from Ma Phyo's reaction, it was clear that *kye:zu:* and loans could not be linked. In this sense, the obligation to repay that was clearly stated in the agreements made monetary debts seem inherently contradictory to the ethos of *kye:zu:*. One then wonders what will

happen when Sakurai's insistence on the obligations of loan agreements begins to infringe on Burmese actors' sense of *kye:zu:*.

In a telling foreshadowing, Ma Khaing told me that loans could sometimes be linked with *kye:zu:*, but the imposition of interest and contractual agreements would probably decrease the sense of *kye:zu:* among those who borrow. She supposed that this would be because *kye:zu:* was in part a sense of gratitude for the fact that the creditor was taking the risk that the loan might not be repaid. Imposing interest and signing an agreement were attempts to displace this risk for the creditor, and Ma Khaing saw this as evidence of a lack of trust (*yonkyihmú*). If *kye:zu:* as it appeared in OISCA was the commitment to an abundant gratitude, trust in debt-relations seemed to be a commitment to an endless uncertainty. "But," she concluded, "sometimes people don't pay on time or at all, and that's why sometimes we need to use agreements" (personal communication, November 5, 2010). She held onto the value of *kye:zu:*, but she also realized the importance of ensuring the monetary repayment of loans for the material sustainability of the training center. This ability to hold contrasting perspectives seemed to me to be evidence of the fact that she was aware of the different values at play in the language of indebtedness. In some ways, the struggle to make sense of these divergent concepts seemed to be part of her own process of transformation.

From the beginning of our relationship, Ma Khaing impressed me as a very thoughtful person who could juggle the different dynamics in OISCA and the larger questions of her work. On one of our evening walks, she asked me, "What can one do when someone doesn't do the right thing?" I first assumed that she was talking about the training center, but she corrected me.

"I don't mean just the training center, but also in terms of this country and the world. There are people who want to make changes, but nothing changes." This was in

the month before the first general elections were to be held in Burma/Myanmar for the first time in twenty years, and I knew that Ma Khaing was listening to radio broadcasts about the different debates surrounding this historic moment.

“Why do you think that is?” I asked.

“Well... It’s probably because, in the end, everyone only understands his or her own life and nobody else’s. And the people above with power are all rich.” She told me that she was worried about the increasing disparity between rich and poor in Burma/Myanmar.

She also explained that she struggled to figure out how to make everyone work together. Even though Person A might be trying to get people to work together on something, she said, Person B might be luring people to go in the wrong direction.

“What worries me the most about that is that the trainees are always watching us. They are very attentive.”

She was suddenly talking about the training center again. Her seamless switching of perspectives—between the training center and the country, as a staff and a teacher, as powerless and someone in authority—again seemed indicative of her ability to think through the comparisons between different relations. In this conversation, Ma Khaing struggled to figure out how to direct her work, her country, toward what is “right,” and yet knowing that there were differences in ideas and commitments between the various actors. She seemed to have a clear idea of what she considered to be right and wrong, but she also knew that her ethics was not universal or adopted by other people in their daily work. Staff did not always agree on things, and each had his or her own orientation regarding their work. Things were double-edged. She grappled with these tensions in her efforts to change the current situation of things, both at the training center and in the country itself as analogies of each other.

Could the monetary and moral debt-relations in OISCA hint at a potential mechanism of change as Ma Khaing hoped for, both in the training center and in Burma/Myanmar in general? Entering into relations of debt could bring different actors together in the same sphere of exchange, demanding global equality in the spirit of solidarity around the obligation to repay. However, one cannot overlook the fact here that *kye:zu:*, *on-gaeshi*, and loans all had the effect of obscuring inequalities and imbalances in relations. That is, although most of the Burmese staff told me how committed they were to their work and to OISCA specifically, the different values attributed to their commitments to the obligation to repay were defined within debt-relations, which maintained hierarchical relations between Japanese staff and Burmese staff, between Japan and Burma/Myanmar. The fact that the loans could breed more loans, and the possibility that the abundant *kye:zu:* of Burmese staff could keep them bound to OISCA indefinitely, hinted at the fact that these debt-relations for the Burmese staff remained within the institutional framework of OISCA, a Japanese organization.

In this sense, perhaps the changes that Ma Khaing hoped for could only exist in the struggles to construe an ethics of indebtedness around different relational structures of hierarchy and obligation to one another. While I agree with David Graeber's (2011) conclusion to his magnum opus on the history of the debt that it is time to figure out other forms of sociality, this seems to be an almost impossible demand, given the permeation of both moral and monetary debt-relations that I observed in OISCA. Even if monetary debts disappeared, how could we guarantee that moral debts would not transform into material ones? And how would we do away with moral debts? Would that even be something we should strive for, especially if part of its effects is to create ethical meaning for people, such as *kye:zu:* for OISCA's Burmese staff?



Figure 22: Burmese staff on their way to vote in the historic election.

Perhaps, if we take the practices of debt-relations in OISCA as an analogy, we could at least expect the positions of creditor and debtor to shift and a different structure of power relations might emerge as a result. Even if this might be a compromised goal, even with the danger of an underlying anticipation of violence (Graeber 2012), working in this direction might be the only hope for change that development work allows.



## CONCLUSION

On March 11, 2011, an earthquake of unprecedented magnitude struck the east coast of Japan. Along the coastline of the Tohoku region, large portions of cities and villages were swept away by the tsunami, leaving behind an indescribable landscape of destruction. As of January 30, 2013, there are 15,880 people dead and 2,700 people still missing (Keisatsuchō 2013). Thousands of others are displaced, especially from Fukushima prefecture where radiation fears from the destroyed nuclear reactors still abound. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Japan is facing a critical time in history. “Crisis” is a word in everybody’s vocabulary these days.

Soon after the earthquake, another word entered popular discourse: *kizuna*. Meaning “bonds” or “ties between people,” it became ubiquitous throughout Japan, from politicians to the general public. As early as April 11, 2011, the prime minister at the time, Naoto Kan, made a statement to thank the world for their aid and support, which was entitled, “Kizuna—the Bonds of Friendship” (Kan 2011). At the end of the year, *kizuna* was chosen as the word of the year by the annual poll of the Kanji Aptitude Testing Foundation (British Broadcasting Corporation 2011).

Ostensibly, valuing *kizuna*—our human bonds to each other—is a good thing. In 2011, it was a term that was popularized as a way to convey support and solidarity with those affected by the disasters. Yet, there is something unnerving about the word. The psychiatrist and social critic, Tamaki Saitō, warned that the “*kizuna* bias,” as he called it, can highlight personal ties and promote values of self-help, in turn obscuring social dynamics and structural problems (Saitō 2011). Similarly, in my trips to disaster-affected areas in the Tohoku region as well as in my conversations with those working

with communities still dealing with the damages of the 1995 Kobe earthquake, *kizuna* appears as a word that people feel hides as much as it expresses, if not more.

I agree with this perspective that *kizuna* is a duplicitous term. But my concern is of a slightly different nature. In studying OISCA and its aspiring relations, what strikes me about *kizuna* is how much it resonates with OISCA's dynamic of constructing differences and gaps, and attempting to bridge them through particular aspiring relations. As I argued in chapter two, a sense of global and national crisis has pervaded the dominant worldview in OISCA, and the forging of relations with cultural others was a form of redemptive dream, as if Japan could "redo" modernity differently in other countries by using "Japanese values." This dream is very much along the lines of the global culturalism that I outline in chapter one. While young Japanese staff and Burmese staff contested this dream of redemption, the global culturalist undercurrent and its allusions to disquieting memories of Japanese imperialism and colonialism persisted. In fact, this was the shadow that followed all the forms of aspiring relations that I traced in each chapter. The efforts of intimate labor to create aid work as a work of care were tinged with whiffs of colonial relations, for example. The simulative practices of leading-by-example foregrounded the struggles to negotiate goals of replication and the demands of difference, but the view of Japan and OISCA as "the model" remained as the assumption. And the formulation of aid work as motivated in the obligation to repay debts, conceptualized as ethical demands in various ways, seemed to recreate in a way a structure of unequal colonial relations. Threading the idea of *kizuna* through these forms of intercultural relationality, I am unsettled by the possibility that the celebration of relations and social ties, particularly in the wake of a crisis, can serve to sustain culturalist, even neocolonial, ideologies.

At the same time, it is also a fact that many of the non-Japanese staff and trainees found meaning in the experience of training and working at OISCA. For example, a Burmese staff who had trained in food processing at the Shikoku training center in Japan for two years, spearheaded the establishment of an OISCA restaurant in the village near the Myanmar training center. She was thrilled when it opened in the fall of 2012, and posted photographs on Facebook, commenting on how beautiful it looked. The restaurant is called Furusato. The other Burmese staff members at the Myanmar training center were also proud to be part of OISCA, and senior staff seriously engaged with the question of how to keep the training center going without a Japanese presence. Given that many of the staff had been there for over a decade since the age of nineteen or twenty, it made sense that their work and the organization would mean so much to them. Similarly, the experience of being in OISCA was important even for those who had spent less time there. For example, two former trainees, one from India and another from Panama, had babies in the year or two after finishing their time at OISCA (with Indian and Panamanian husbands, respectively), and gave their daughters names using Japanese words: Yume (“dream”) and Aiko (“child of love”).

Thus, it would be inaccurate to categorically state that OISCA’s activities were purely oppressive, and thus, this is not an argument that I can make. It was evident that non-Japanese trainees and staff were also invested in their work and experiences at OISCA in their own ways. Nevertheless, the logic of global culturalism that posited relational and conceptual “gaps,” and the aspirations for particular kinds of proximity amidst a sense of crisis and loss, are aspects of OISCA’s conceptualization of international aid that need to be considered critically. That is, we must be attentive to the ways that discourses of relationality such as *kizuna* can bring in neoimperialist and neocolonial designs through the backdoor, even if it is also embraced by its subjects.

In this dissertation, I have suggested that one way to be attentive is to foreground the kinds of struggles, uncertainties, and ambivalences that were central to the daily lives of OISCA's aid actors. Global culturalism was premised on the distinction between national-cultures, and this highlighted the coexistence and clash between different cultural entities. Taking their aftershock effects, and the ways in which the negotiation of such shocks impacted the intercultural and interpersonal relationships among the different aid actors, is an important way to track how aspiring relations are not necessarily only about the reproduction of oppressive structures. The "double-takes" that such culture shocks elicit can activate a conscious consideration of the differences among the various aid actors, and how best to respond to such encounters with difference. I suggest that the explicit articulation of these dynamics would clarify how understandings of international aid work are constructed in OISCA, and thus also help create possibilities for change. It is not enough to change mission statements, organizational structures, and processes of project implementation, because I do not think that that is where the engine of OISCA's aid activities lies.

Yet, intercultural relations, much less "culture shock," were not an aspect of aid work that OISCA's aid actors engaged with seriously. Certainly, it was a defining part of their professional and personal lives, as I show in the introduction and chapters, but it was never a topic of explicit discussion. At the offices of the Tokyo headquarter, people talked incessantly about the reforms that they had to implement in accordance with the registration for a new legal status, from an incorporated foundation (*zaidan hōjin*) to a public interest incorporated foundation (*kōeki zaidan hōjin*) according to the 2008 Reform of the Public Interest Corporation System (*kōeki hōjin seido kaikaku*). Accounting formats and organizational structures were being changed in profound ways to meet the legal requirements. In addition, there were always discussions about

how to change departmental structures, project documentation practices, specification of mission statements, and other administrative issues in accordance with what the Tokyo office staff felt were necessary in order to meet the demands of corporate donors and standards of other NGOs in Japan.<sup>61</sup> In all of this talk, however, there was never mention of the issue of intercultural and interpersonal relationships in OISCA. This was, in a way, taken for granted as the “muddiness” of aid work, and it seemed that it did not qualify as an object of critical reflection. This was particularly the case for the Japanese staff in the Tokyo office who, for the most part, did not interact with non-Japanese staff or trainees, nor with explicitly Ananaikyō positions.

Yet, the struggle with relations was clearly the defining experience of many of OISCA’s aid workers and trainees. Actors in “the field,” that is, at the training centers, were especially aware of this and characterized their work in those terms. It was not that people were not self-reflexive about the difficulties of intercultural, intergenerational, and other interpersonal relations in their work; they simply seemed to take it as an inconsequential aspect of the work that they had to decipher on their own. It was a central part of their professionalism, but it was also a marginalized factor in organizational terms, and it was never addressed as a topic of discussion at the headquarter office. My contention is that relational dynamics, particularly their effects of ambivalence in the face of difference, were a crucial mechanism of international aid work. In fact, aid work was defined by the ways that people conceptualized and aspired for particular relations. Accordingly, I would also argue that one of the most significant effects of international aid work today is the production of certain modes of intercultural and intersocial interaction. In other words, as much as aid work is about the provision of relief supplies, empowerment, or poverty alleviation, it is also a means

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<sup>61</sup> I plan to address these aspects of the OISCA Tokyo office in an article in the near future.

by which people understand themselves in a transnational and transgenerational world, and learn to engage with difference of various kinds.

In this sense, I propose that there was something simultaneously disconcerting and hopeful in what one of the few young Ananaikyō-OISCA staff members, Harada, told me. At one point during our interview in June 2010, he explained to me that in Ananaikyō there was a strong awareness of “Japan” as a nation-state to uphold, and furthermore, a pronounced sense of crisis (*kikikan*) and need to protect the country. For example, he told me that one of the recent issues with which Ananaikyō had been engaged as a group was the problem of peripheral territories, such as the island of Tsushima. Located between Fukuoka prefecture in southern Japan and the Korean peninsula, it has been a site of territorial disputes for years (Agence France-Presse 2008). Harada recounted that the previous year in 2009, Ananaikyō had organized a group of young Ananaikyō members to go to Tsushima so that they may become aware of Japan’s borders. In particular, the aim was to make these young people realize how close Korea is to Japan—they could see Korea across the ocean through a telescope—and develop a sense of imminent crisis (personal communication, June 21, 2010).

This anecdote is alarming in light of recent events over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands between China and Japan, which some observers are warning could escalate to war (The Economist 2013). It makes sense given Yonosuke Nakano’s nationalist movement in the 1970s, and the general sense of crisis that forms the basis of OISCA’s activities. Nevertheless, I propose that we separate Ananaikyō and OISCA in considering such issues. In fact, I find that Harada’s openness regarding Ananaikyō’s trip to Tsushima is helpful in making that distinction, as much as it is troubling. He told me that he had always “had a complex” (*oime ga atta*) about religion, knowing that it made him different from others who are not Ananaikyō. So he just did not talk about

his religion to “outside people” (*soto no hito*). It was probably the same for other Ananaikyō children, he explained, and added that it was the same in OISCA too. According to him, when he first joined OISCA a couple of years earlier, the senior Ananaikyō staff hid the personal and organizational religious affiliations even more than today. But he told them that they should not try to hide it. Or rather, he corrected himself:

I told them that if they are going to decide to not show it at all, then they need to hide it completely and get rid of the altar in the basement of the office, stop going to Ananaikyō events as OISCA staff members, and so on. But right now they do these things, but don’t talk about it, so of course other people are weirded out by it. That’s why when I go to an Ananaikyō event after work, I tell my coworkers openly. [Personal communication, June 21, 2010]

At a later juncture in our conversation, he added: “If you dig deep into international aid work, there’s always a philosophy (*shisō*), and there’s nothing strange about that. If you hide it, the ideals (*rinēn*) will get hidden even more deeply. And if it’s hidden, outside people will end up feeling isolated (*sogaikan*). It would be better if there was more transparency.”

Framed in this perspective, then, I suggest that his explanation of the Tsushima trip can fall into a similar attempt to clarify distinctions in a way that allows us to see that Ananaikyō and OISCA are not the same thing, although they are interrelated. In other words, I argue that if Ananaikyō represented the nationalistic aspects of Yonosuke Nakano’s legacy of institutions, OISCA with the centrality of intercultural relations in its activities, shows us another direction. These are linked but separate orientations. As the global culturalist claims in OISCA showed, positing “gaps” between cultural and other categories was an important part of the worldview among OISCA’s senior staff and supporters, rooted in Ananaikyō values. But as I have

demonstrated in this dissertation, this was tempered in OISCA by the struggles to create relations across differences, which was never complete. Therefore, the global culturalist constructions of essentialist differences and the messiness of aspiring relations that destabilized such distinctions were inseparable in an ambivalent dynamic.

In this sense, a misuse of the story of the Tsushima trip is important here: that is, if the trip was meant to create an awareness of national-cultural boundaries, this can be the seed for reflection and transformation, rather than a nationalistic claim or a cry of crisis. Just as Harada believed that openness about Ananaikyō, and thus an amplification of the distinctions between Ananaikyō and non-Ananaikyō staff might inspire better communication within the organization, the attentiveness to “gaps,” categories, and difference could inspire the various aid actors to reflect on their work and on their modes of relating to one another in a more explicit way. In this way, aid actors would not need to inadvertently transmit imperialist and colonial traces through the intimate labor valued in “the field” of aid work, for example, and begin to formulate ways in which their relationships to one another could be formulated differently, without throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The tension between global culturalism and the dynamics of aspiring relations points to different possible futures along OISCA’s trajectory. At the same time, without “gaps,” relations cannot hold our aspirations. As such, aid work is a profession and a socio-political domain through which different actors constantly engage in the balancing act between gaps and relations, the imagination of incommensurables and the compulsions of commensuration. The perpetual elusion of a conclusion and sense of ambivalence are critical in keeping this dynamic moving, without congealing into views of an irrevocably oppositional world, or dissipating into inscrutable fuzzy warm feelings of universal human connectivity.



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